Compassion in The Tibetan Book of the Dead and the Tractate Mourning: A Comparative Study

Vanessa Rebecca Sasson
Faculty of Religious Studies
McGill, Montreal
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ABSTRACT

The Tibetan Book of the Dead and the Jewish *Tractate Mourning* are important texts about death in their respective traditions. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is a manual read by the living to the deceased as the deceased journeys through the many realms of the after-life. It is an abstract. philosophical text. The *Tractate Mourning* on the other hand. is a highly empirical and pragmatic text that guides the living through their loss. It is concerned only with the living left behind and offers no guidance to the deceased. Despite this profound difference however. this thesis has as its objective to show that both traditions. as evidenced through these texts. share an underlying emotion: compassion. Through the concern shown to the deceased as he or she stumbles through the often terrifying realms of the after-life in the Tibetan tradition. and through the precise and detailed instructions given to the living in the Jewish tradition as the mourners are guided through their grief. both texts exhibit profound compassion.

SOMMAIRE

The Tibetan Book of the Dead et le *Tractate Mourning* des juifs sont. dans leurs traditions respectives. des textes importants concernant la mort. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* est un livre d'instructions récité au décédé. alors que ce dernier traverse les nombreux royaumes de la vie après la mort. C'est un texte philosophique et abstrait. Le *Tractate Mourning*. par contre. est un texte hautement empirique et pratique qui ne

s'adresse qu'aux vivants. Il ne se préoccupe que des survivants, en quelque sorte abandonnés, et ne propose aucun réconfort au mort.

Malgré cette différence majeure, l'intention de cette thèse est de démontrer que ces deux traditions, tel qu'illustrées dans ces textes, partagent en contrepoint la même émotion: la compassion. Soit par le souci des problèmes du défunt, alors qu'il se fraye un chemin à travers les royaumes parfois terrifiants de la vie après la mort dans la tradition tibétaine, ou par les instructions précises et détaillées offertes aux survivants dans la tradition juive, alors que ceux qui sont en deuil sont guidés à travers leur peine, ces textes démontrent, tous les deux, une profonde compassion.

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I have Jewish roots and Buddhist wings...

Stalking Elijah, Rodger Kamenetz

INTRODUCTION

Death is the most universal human experience. Everyone is faced with it; everyone must deal with it. What is fascinating however, is that, despite its universality, the ways of dealing with death are so diversified. The beliefs, the traditions, the rituals, the prayers and the disposal of the body differ in almost every time and place. From hired wailers in the Middle East to silent mourners in Tibet, from earth burial to water burial to cremation, from praise to God's glory to despair and nihilism, from heaven to reincarnation, the ways of dealing with death are many. I have found myself asking whether, despite all of these differences, a unifying emotion underlies this experience. In other words, do these many ritual and belief-oriented differences indicate profound emotional differences, or is there an emotion common to all underlying these differences as one faces death.

The Tibetan Buddhist and Jewish traditions evolved in very different cultural settings. The Tibetan Buddhist world is one of snowy Himalayan peaks and vast quiet space. It was a closed kingdom for centuries, remaining virtually untouched by modern western civilization. The Jewish tradition evolved in the scorching desert heat and eventually spread throughout the world. It embraced a monotheistic version of the universe, whereas in the Tibetan world, there is no theism. Tibetan Buddhism is generally expressed through philosophical teachings; Judaism is generally expressed through law. Judaism began many thousands of years ago; Buddhism only reached Tibet in the eighth century CE. There has almost certainly been no contact between these two cultures until very recently. If there is a common underlying emotion or direction in the ways in which these two cultures deal with death, it may perhaps be emblematic of a universal experience. In any case, it would be a first step towards discovering one.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead and the Jewish *Tractate Mourning* are the two texts I will be examining for this work. Both texts possibly originate from the eighth century CE and both are important texts that deal with death in their respective traditions. They are certainly not the sole representatives of either tradition, for both Judaism and Tibetan Buddhism share an enormous literary wealth, but they are representative to a certain degree. The fact that they are merely the tips of giant icebergs does not take away from the fact that they are nonetheless part of the icebergs themselves.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead is a manual read by the living to the deceased. It is a step-by-step guide through the afterlife that exhibits little concern for the mourners: all the attention is directed to the one undergoing the major process of death, and there is absolutely no direction given regarding the disposal of the body. It is a highly philosophical and abstract text. *The Tractate Mourning* on the other hand, is a legalistic text concerned with the mourning rites of those left behind by the deceased. The after-life is never mentioned or discussed, for the deceased is believed to be in the hands of God, and therefore is no longer a concern for the living. The text is entirely directed to the mourners. It deals with grievance rites and the disposal of the body. *The Tractate Mourning* is therefore a very pragmatic text concerned only for the living.

These two texts are therefore completely different in appearance. One is solely deceased-oriented, while the other is solely survivor-oriented. One deals with a whole range of unverifiable assumptions about what happens after death and shows almost no concern for the survivors, while the other deals with the community and the response of the survivors and therefore with very manifest empirical realities. One is abstract while the

other is pragmatic. The question I put forth in this work is whether, despite these profound differences, there are any unifying emotional similarities. I will begin by examining the contents of each text and will then give a comparative analysis.

CHAPTER I

The Bar do thos grol

The Tibetan Book of the Dead, as it is popularly known in the West, is a manual used by the living for the dead. It is a metaphysical instruction pamphlet, guiding the dead along its journey through the after-death states. It is believed in Tibet that, although the body may be clinically dead, consciousness remains for some time and can hear those around it. This text therefore serves to guide this consciousness along its journey, explaining to it what it is experiencing and why. For the skilled practitioner, this explanation will serve as a guide towards enlightenment; for everyone else, it will serve to ease the journey's tumultuous terrain.

In the West, it is generally believed that life is linear: there is a beginning and an end, a birth and a death. No one returns after death, for death marks the end. One may move on to a heaven of some kind, but the life left behind is left behind permanently. In Tibet however, life and death are not markers of a beginning and an end. Life is believed to be both beginningless and endless; there is only the cycle of existence in which most beings are trapped. Due to this cyclical view of things, death is not interpreted as a tragic finale to life, a definitive act to be desperately feared, but rather as a powerful moment to be experienced and learned from. It is a moment of great intensity and is therefore approached as a great opportunity for liberation. Enlightenment is always available, but at this moment of death, when the mind is completely cleared of all distraction and obstruction, naked, pure, and fully aware, it is in an ideal position. Whether or not enlightenment is achieved at this point depends on oneself.

Before I begin with the main content of this chapter, I would like to explain two things: the meaning of the title of the text, and the meaning of the word *bar do* (from here on in referred to as *bardo*, in one word).

The complete title of the text in English is translated as *The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo*. In other words, it is a liberation that can be attained at this moment upon hearing the text read aloud. There are many ways and means by which someone may become enlightened. The title of this text is implying that the means by which it is proposing enlightenment is by hearing it. Although I will only develop the theme of the reader of the text in a later chapter of this paper, it is important to recognize both the meaning of this title and what it implies. The importance of the reader in this process is primary. As the reader reads and the consciousness of the dead listens, the opportunity for enlightenment may be seized.

Bardo may be translated as "intermediate state" or "gap". It is a transitional state between two others, likened to an island on a lake for example. Indeed, we may say that there is no moment or time during life or death which cannot be defined as a *bardo*. Everything is transitory, every moment is fleeting, and therefore ever stage one may find oneself in is a gap, a *bardo*. There are largely defined *bardos*, such as the *Bardo* of this Life or the *Bardo* of Dying, but then there are myriad other *bardo*s as well, such as the *Bardo* of Childhood perhaps, or the *Bardo* of Writing These Words. The *bardo* referred to in the title of this text is the *Bardo* of the After-Death state. This then can be subdivided into smaller *bardos*.

In this paper, I will subdivide the text into three *bardos*, following Evans-Wentz' schema: the *Bardo* of Dying, the *Bardo* of the Experiencing of Reality and the *Bardo* of Rebirth. I will also refer to the text by its Tibetan transliteration: the *Bar do thos grol*, for the sake of both simplicity and accuracy.

The Origins

There is very little factual information verifying the authorship of the *Bar do thos grol*. There is however, a wonderful legend surrounding its appearance in Tibet, and it is this legend that is most widely recounted. To weave the tale of the legend, one must begin with its hero, the great Padmasambhava.

Padmasambhava, the Sanskrit compound for 'a being born from a lotus', is possibly the most important saint Tibet has ever known, for it is to him that credit is attributed for bringing Buddhism to Tibet. No altar or shrine is complete in Tibet without an image of the Lotus Born above it. In Tibet, the story of his life is filled with magic and spell-binding tales. He has become a wonderful character of both history and mythology, and so his biography has become, in the words of Vessantara, one of the greatest spiritual documents of mankind. We will find that, as his life is told,

> inner and outer events are so fused that it is frequently impossible to decide on what level of reality the events described took place. Are we watching actual events in the outside world - events which to us seem preternatural? Are we reliving Padmasambhava's visionary experiences? (Vessantara, 244)

So far as legend has it, there had been very little Buddhist influence in Tibet until the eighth century. Buddhism was known but its presence was minimal, shadowed as it was by Bon, the principal religion at that time. In the eighth century, King Trisong Detsen

sought to establish a serious propagation of the Buddhist religion. He therefore sent for the famous scholar, Santaraksita. This Indian "acarya bodhisattva" was requested to expound the dharma and oversee the building of the first Buddhist temple in Tibet. However, so legend has it, the Bon deities caused all sorts of natural disasters and political problems in order to obstruct his endeavors. They were protecting their territory and refused to allow a foreign religion with its foreign gods to come and overtake their home. As the fourteenth century Tibetan scholar Bu-ton tells us, the coming of Buddhism

> brought the malignant deities of Tibet into a fury. The grassy plain was devastated by a flood, lightening struck the hill of Mar-po-ri and diseases befalling men and cattle broke out. The Tibetan subjects claimed that this was a consequence of the propagation of a false doctrine and Santaraksita was sent back to Nepal (Strong, 258)

The temple was consequently not built and the dharma had not succeeded in establishing itself. Santaraksita failed in his attempt.

Padmasambhava hereupon enters the scene. Padmasambhava was considered to be the most qualified wizard of his time as well as an excellent Tantric practitioner and teacher. He was therefore summoned to Tibet in order to bring these fierce and angry Bon deities under control. Bu-ton describes the situation as follows:

> When [Santaraksita] had come back, the acarya met the king... and said to him: "As the demons of Tibet are not subdued, they do not allow that one acts for the sake of the Doctrine. They are powerful and endowed with huge bodies. It is therefore necessary to subdue them. Now there exists a teacher called Padmasambhava who is endowed with great power and dexterity. You must invite him in order to pacify the devils." (Strong, 258)

Padmasambhava was thus sent for by the king of Tibet. It is recounted that the magical Padmasambhava knew beforehand that the king would invite him. When the messenger arrived bearing the invitation, he was already packed and ready to go.

It did not take the Bon deities long to begin causing Padmasambhava problems. No sooner had he entered the outer limits of Tibet than a huge snowstorm barred his way. He defeated these forces by retreating to a cave and sitting quietly in deep meditation. This obviously angered the deities even more. As he entered central Tibet, "the demons and deities massed against him, but his power was so great that he single-handedly defeated them all. The people were amazed that a single man could challenge their powerful demons to personal combat and triumph" (Powers, 129). Padmasambhava magically conquered them all and brought the Tibetan deities down from their anger and jealousy. He even managed to extricate a promise from them that they would protect the dharma from enemies. In this way, Padmasambhava became the great hero of the Tibetan people. He alone staved off demons and established the sacred dharma in Tibet.

It is this very same spiritual hero who is believed to have written the *Bar do thos grol*. According to legend, Padmasambhava brought with him many important Tantric texts from India and proceeded to translate them after his celestial victory. However, it is believed that the *Bar do thos grol* was not originally one of these Sanskrit texts, but was written by Padmasambhava himself, in Tibet, in the Tibetan script. Indeed, there is no known Sanskrit equivalent of this text, so it may very well be of purely Tibetan origin.

Even though Padmasambhava is credited with having written the *Bar do thos grol* in the eighth century, the text appears only in the fourteenth. This gap is commonly explained as being a result of the *gter ma* tradition, the tradition of Hidden Treasures. There is a long-standing tradition across Tibet, but most prominently in the Nyingma school, of sacred texts being "hidden" for specific periods of time until civilization is

prepared to come into contact with them. The texts emerge when their teachings will be the most beneficial to the people born in that time.

The *gter ma* tradition is clearly difficult to explain with any credibility in the Western world. Basically, the idea of *gter ma* is that Padmasambhava authored many texts, but was not prepared to reveal them all at once. He therefore construed this system whereby he hid some of these texts in the world and arranged that they would only be discovered at the appropriate time. Texts were hidden in rocks, trees, lakes, the sky and even in people's minds. As Tulku Thondup Rinpoche explains, *gter ma*s are "scriptures that have been deliberately concealed and discovered at successively appropriate times by realized masters through their enlightened power" (Tulku Thondup Rinpoche, 13). It is as though they are working on a kind of time-release system; they are programmed to appear when they will be most useful. The *Bar do thos grol* is considered to be one of these Hidden Treasures. It was written by Padmasambhava and concealed until the fourteenth century. It was then discovered and released by the famous *gter-ston* (pronounced 'terton', meaning 'revealer of the hidden'), Karma Lingpa, in the year 1326.

Given that there is little if any evidence available to the contrary, Western scholars may do little more than choose to accept or reject this theory of spiritual concealment and discovery. Evans-Wentz, in his introduction to the text, offers a very sound perspective. He acknowledges the possible criticisms this theory could produce in the West, and so states that, whether or not the *gter ma* claim is proven to be false, it would not change the fact that

> the *Bardo Thodol* is now accepted as a sacred book in Tibet and has for some considerable time been used by the lamas for reading over the dead... only the

> theory concerning the textual compilation of what, in its essentials, is apparently a prehistory ritual would be subject to revision (Evans-Wentz, 76).

Whether or not such a theory of Hidden Treasures can be proven to be true is not the aim of this paper. We need only recognize that this is the theory adopted by most Tibetans today of all schools to explain the magical origins of this sacred text, the *Bar do thos grol.*

The Text: The Introduction

The text begins with traditional obeisances to the deities and a brief introduction. It is most common for sacred Buddhist texts, or even commentaries to sacred Buddhist texts, to begin with a prayer of obeisance to the relevant deities. Thurman translates this prayer as follows:

> O Amitaba, boundless light of the Truth Body,
> O mild and fierce Beatific Body Lotus Deities,
> O Padma Sambhava, incarnate savior of beings -
> I bow to the Three Bodies in the Spiritual Mentors!
> (Thurman, 117)

According to Lama Kazi Dawa Samdup, these deities to whom homage is paid are to be recognized as being within oneself: "They are not something apart from us. We are one with all that is, in every state of sentient existence, from the lowest worlds of suffering to the highest states of bliss and Perfect Enlightenment" (Evans-Wentz, 85, footnote 2). We thus encounter right from the outset the most fundamental message of this text, *viz.* that everything experienced during the *bardos* of this life is experienced in cooperation with one's own mind. Experiences do not simply happen to a person, but rather they happen as a result of cooperative involvement: consequently, the images that appear before the mind are not entirely external entities, but entities of the mind as much as entities outside of it.

The *Bar do thos grol* requests right from the beginning with the obeisances that the recognition of this fact be made in order for enlightenment to dawn, that responsibility be taken by the subject for the subject's own experiences, for nothing is experienced, neither in life nor in death, that is not at the same time a reflection of a part of oneself.

Immediately following these obeisances, the text goes on to give a few instructions to the reader regarding how this text is to be used, by whom and when. For instance, for those who have practiced all their lives with diligence and mastery, this text would be unnecessary; for their emancipation is well-guided, if not already accomplished, by their personal practice. However, it instructs that for all others, this text needs to be read aloud at the moment dying has begun in order to assist one in one's journey through the *bardos* and hopefully out of samsara.

The instructions also include details pertaining to the way in which one must read the text. For example, if the deceased body is not present at the time of the reading, the reader is instructed to sit on the dead person's seat, "and proclaiming the power of the truth call on his consciousness and read, imagining him sitting in front and listening" (Fremantle, 34). The reader is also instructed to escort wailing relatives out of the death chamber, for this wailing may cause the dead person irritation or attachment. Furthermore, although the reader is required to read the text close to the dead person's ear, the reader must not touch it for fear of interfering with the dead person's process.

These and other instructions are given before the reading is to begin, as well as throughout the entire text. From the moment the dying process has begun until the

moment rebirth has been accomplished, the text immerses the reader in details. The significance of these details and instructions are reserved for a later chapter.

Part I - The *'Chi kha'i Bar do*: The *Bardo* of Dying

In order to grasp the meaning behind the idea of this first *bardo* in the process of dying, one must be familiar with the Tibetan medical theories of death. The *Bardo* of Dying is defined as being from the moment one is struck with the ailment that will eventually cause one's death until the moment death occurs. We must therefore begin by exploring how death is believed to occur medically in the Tibetan tradition, and then we will be capable of understanding when these two moments of the first *bardo* are believed to occur.

The Tibetan medical view of the body consists of a complicated theory of winds, channels and drops. I will give here only a very brief account of it. According to the Mantric system, there are seventy-two thousand channels coursing through the body. They may perhaps be likened to the nervous system, with its comparable thousands of channels branching off in all directions. Of these many thousand channels, there are three main channels which are the most important: the central channel running from the forehead to the top of the head and down to the base of the spine with channels on its right and left sides (Dalai Lama, 1984, p.172). There are seven channel-centers that are described as wheels located at different points along these main channels. At each of these wheels, "the right and left channels wrap around the central one, constricting it and lessening or preventing the passage of the wind" (Hopkins, 14). The winds of the body are kinds of

energies that course along these channels throughout the body and are obstructed at certain vital points from passage. At the moment of death, the channels loosen and unwrap themselves from the main channel, thereby releasing the wind to flow freely. The channels then dissolve into what Tibetan medicine calls the very subtle life-bearing wind at the heart. This wind resides in what is called the indestructible drop, for it lasts until death. As Hopkins tells us, the very subtle life-bearing wind dwells inside this drop and, "at death, all winds ultimately dissolve into it, whereupon the clear light of death dawns" (Hopkins, 15). At the moment of death, which is equivalent to the moment of the loosening of all constrictions in the body, the subtle mind is finally free to manifest itself before the subject's eyes. There are no longer any obstructions or obscurations: the mind is naked and pure and reveals itself in its magnificence and entirety. It is for this reason that the moment of death may be approached as an excellent opportunity to recognize reality, to recognize the nature of all that is. Death may serve, in the Tibetan view, as a powerful jumping-off point to enlightenment, for it is, for most sentient beings, only in death that the mind becomes truly free and pure. As the channels uncoil themselves and the winds are finally free to course through the body, one is confronted with the wonderful opportunity to realize the dharma entirely.

At this point, the body begins to dissolve element by element. The body is believed to consist of various elements, and these dissolve one after another as the death process takes place. Moreover, Tibetan medicine claims that as these elements dissolve, one experiences both inner and outer "signs".

The first element to dissolve is the earth element, which dissolves into water. As this element gradually loses its force, it becomes less capable of serving as a basis of consciousness. According to the Dalai Lama, simultaneously, "the capacity of the water constituent in your body to serve as a basis of consciousness becomes more manifest" (Dalai Lama, 1984, p.173). In other words, the dissolution of one element into the next does not mean to imply that the earth element is actually being dissolved into water, but rather, that as the earth element dissolves, the next element, i.e. that of water, becomes stronger. When the water element dissolves into fire, this similarly means that the water element loses its force and simultaneously the fire element becomes more manifest.

When the earth element dissolves into water, the limbs become thinner and more frail, and one's appearance begins to deteriorate. Strength is lost, as one can no longer hold oneself upright and fatigue sets in. Some traditional texts say "that it is as if a huge mountain were being pressed down upon us and we were being squashed by it" (Sogyal Rinpoche, 251). Moreover, sight becomes unclear and the subject will have difficulty keeping his or her eyes open. The internal experience that accompanies this is the arising of "a bluish appearance called 'like a mirage'. It is like an appearance of water when the light of the sun strikes the desert in the summer" (Hopkins, 35). Thus, as his or her strength begins to fail and deterioration begins, the Tibetans believe that a vision appears to the dying one. This vision, which is as much an experience as it is a vision, is the first internal sign that death has begun. To the skilled practitioner, this sign is like a familiar marker along the road; to everyone else, it is strange and possibly frightening. The *Bar do*

thos grol therefore here serves to explain this vision and to lead the confused subject to benefit from its meaning.

Just as the dissolution of earth into water is coming to an end, the next dissolution, that of water, begins. At this stage, all bodily fluids become dry. Lips become chapped, the fluid in the eyes dry, and even the abilities to sweat and urinate become lessened. There is a coagulation of blood and semen, and furthermore, the process is marked by the loss of the ability to discriminate between pleasant and unpleasant sensations. Meanwhile, the inner experience undergone by the subject is a perception of a "smoke-like appearance that seems to fill all of space. This appears like a billowing smoke coming from a chimney" (Powers, 291). Just as a mirage-like appearance came forth when the earth element dissolved, so now a smoke-like vision is experienced. Again, the skilled practitioner will recognize this sign, but everyone else requires guidance.

With the dissolution of the water element, the fire element becomes manifest and then begins to dissolve. Body temperature diminishes and the capacity to digest food and drink is lost. The dying person slowly loses interest in the affairs surrounding him or her and even forgets the names of those closest to them. The sense of smell deteriorates and exhalations become very long. The internal experience of this stage of the dying process is "the arising of an appearance called 'like fireflies'. It is like burning red sparks seen within puffs of smoke rising from a chimney or like red sparks on the soot on the bottom of a pan used for parching grain" (Hopkins, 37).

The fire element then dissolves into the wind element of the body. At this point, breath ceases and "our last feeling of contact with our physical environment [slips] away"

(Sogyal Rinpoche, 252). The internal experience is a perception of a reddish glow from a flame. It is also described as the "burning-butter-lamp-glow".

In the West, most would consider this moment of dissolution to be the moment of death. However, according to Tibetan medicine, death has not yet occurred, for consciousness still inhabits the body. The Dalai Lama explains:

> In general, people consider this to be death because your heart is no longer beating. If a doctor came, he would say you were already dead; however, from our point of view, you are still in the process of dying; you have not yet died. Your sense consciousnesses have disappeared, but the mental consciousness remains (Dalai Lama, 1984, p.175).

We can therefore see that the moment of death as defined in the West and as defined in Tibet are quite different. This is important given that the first *bardo* in the process of death is one which is defined, as we have seen, to be from the moment one is afflicted with the cause of death until the moment of death itself. However, death does not occur, as the West would generally believe, i.e. at the cessation of breath and heartbeat. It occurs, in the Tibetan view, somewhat later.

After these four elements have dissolved, the five phenomena of the self must dawn and dissolve. The fifth phenomenon is the moment of death. The first of these five is called the 'eighty indicative conceptions'. Even though gross consciousness has dissolved gradually with the dissolution of the elements, there are still more subtle levels of consciousness that remain. The eighty indicative conceptions are the coarsest of these subtle consciousnesses, and therefore are the first to dawn upon one after the elements have dissolved. The subject at this moment experiences an appearance like a burning butter-lamp.

The next consciousness to dawn and dissolve is the mind of radiant white appearance. This is described as being the "dawning of extreme clarity and vacuity as well as of light with a white aspect like a night sky pervaded by moonlight in the autumn when the sky is free of defilement" (Hopkins, 42). Although this tremendous experience is being undergone internally, there are no longer any external signs. Defilements and obstructions are gradually being stripped away from the mind, and thus the dying person is gradually moving towards possibly the most powerful moment he or she has ever known, but the body remains still. The body indeed, appears to be dead, with no activity taking place therein. The true state of the body however, is believed to be dramatically different.

After this dawning of clarity, it dissolves into the mind of red increase. This is described as being a red or orange appearance, "empty and vacuous but much clearer than before, shines like an autumn sky, free of defilement and pervaded by sunlight" (Hopkins, 42). It is called the mind of increase because it is considered to be vivid like sunlight. It leads to an increase in awareness and clarity. Channels and wheels are at this point loosening their lifelong hold on each other, and the winds are gradually moving towards the heart center. The mind is being stripped of its obstructions and is leading itself slowly toward ultimate clarity and nakedness. Soon enough, there will no longer be anything separating the mind from reality.

The mind of black near-attainment is the penultimate mental phenomenon to occur before the moment of death. This experience is presented as being a "black vacuous appearance like an autumn sky free of defilement and pervaded by the thick darkness of the beginning of night" (Hopkins, 43).

All of these appearances that are taking place, as well as the ones that have yet to occur, are clearly understood as coming from within the subject's own mind and therefore are not the products of something without. The appearance of the sunlight for example, during the moment of the dawning of the mind of red increase, "is not a case of the illumination of sunlight and so forth shining from outside" (Hopkins, 43). The sunlight that pervades one's vision at this time is the sunlight of one's own mind. Indeed, everything that occurs during any one of these *bardos* is a reflection from within. This is the most recurrent and most important theme of the entire text.

The Clear Light of Death now presents itself. This is the final manifestation to take place before life departs. As the Clear Light shines, life finally ebbs away, for the dawning of the Clear Light of Death marks the end of life. It is the moment of actual death. It therefore also marks the end of the *Bardo* of Dying. At this most intense of moments, as the dying slowly becomes deceased, he or she encounters the appearance of clear vacuity without the slightest coarse dualism. Although appearances of clear vacuity have been encountered before this moment, it has always been accompanied by some notion or tinge of subject-object dualism. However, at this moment of death, all notions of dualism fade away and the subject is left embracing complete oneness. There is only perfectly clear light, and the subject no longer distinguishes him or herself from it. It is described as being like "the natural color of a dawn sky in autumn, free of the three causes of pollution - moonlight, sunlight and darkness. This appearance is like that of a consciousness in meditative equipoise directly realizing emptiness" (Hopkins, 45). This is the greatest climax, the most powerful and intense moment to happen naturally during any one of the

bardos, of this life and beyond. One may attain this moment of the Clear Mind on one's own, without death, through yogic exercise; however, very few sentient beings are so accomplished. For the rest of the Tibetan world, the moment of death is the only encounter one may have with this clarity of mind. It is a moment unequaled in intensity: all constrictions and obscurations have dissolved, all the winds and channels have merged and melted into the indestructible drop at the heart. There is nothing left to obscure the mind. There is only pure consciousness, naked and completely aware. The Dalai Lama calls the Mind of Clear Light the fundamental mind, "because it is the root of all minds; in relation to it, all other minds are just adventitious. It is the mind that exists beginninglessly and continuously in each individual through each lifetime and into Buddhahood" (Dalai Lama, 1984, p.177). No mind, no level of awareness can compare to the Mind of Clear Light, for no mind is ever as pure or as clear. *The Doctrine of the Six Lights* describes this moment as follows:

> The pure elements separate from the impure elements, one is hurled out of the abyss of samsara.
> Illusion is purified.
> The Basis of All is like the sky, without any limitations.
> Innate wisdom, like the sun, shines equally in all directions.
> The miraculous manifestations of the Three Bodies shine like the endless rays of the sun.
> Thus the perfect good of all beings is always accomplished.
> (Orofino, 62)

At this point, the text instructs the reader to explain this appearance to the one in the process of death:

> O son of noble family, (name), listen. Now the pure luminosity of the dharmata is shining before you; recognize it. O son of noble family, at this moment your state of mind is by nature pure emptiness, it does not possess any nature whatsoever, neither substance nor quality such as color, but it is pure emptiness... But this state of mind is not just blank emptiness, it is unobstructed, sparkling, pure and

> vibrant... This mind of yours is inseparable luminosity and emptiness in the form of a great mass of light, it has no birth or death, therefore it is the buddha of Immortal Light. To recognize this is all that is necessary. When you recognize this pure nature of your mind as the buddha, looking into your own mind is resting in the buddhamind" (Fremantle, 37).

The text instructs that these words be repeated three or seven times, clearly and precisely. These words are intended to remind and awaken the subject to the truth of his or her own clear mind. This moment of death offers a very important opportunity. According to the Tibetan world view, death is considered to be a wonderful opportunity. It is not a finality, a traumatic end worthy of despair. Rather, death is to be regarded as the most wondrous of opportunities, for it is in that moment that all becomes clear and the mind is set free. In the moment of death then, the opportunity for enlightenment presents itself with almost shocking intensity. It is in the subject's hands to decide whether or not he or she will seize it as such.

The purpose of this text is to lead its audience to the recognition that all perceptions of the world are really projections of the mind. If, at the moment of death, one does not become overwhelmed by the brilliance of the Clear Light and run away from it, but rather embraces it and recognizes it as emanating from the purest source of self, then enlightenment is accomplished. If however, one fails to recognize this and falls prey to the illusion that this light is separate from oneself, then tumbling into the next *bardo* becomes inevitable. Unfortunately, old habits die hard. If an entire lifetime had been spent in the midst of a dualistic world view, then at the great moment of death, chances are that the dualism will prevail, the Clear Mind will not be recognized as one's own, and the next *bardo*, the *Bardo* of the Experiencing of Reality will dawn.

Part II - The *Chos nyid Bar do*: The *Bardo* of the Experiencing of Reality

The *Bardo* of the Experiencing of Reality, as Evans-Wentz calls it, is perhaps the most mentally dramatic *bardo*, and the most popularly recounted. Once the Clear Light of Death has dawned and evaporated, the illusions begin. One becomes assaulted by all kinds of peaceful and terrifying visions that will evoke the full scope of the human emotional rainbow. Attraction, attachment, fear and repulsion will all unite to traumatize the psyche. It is a dream and a nightmare rolled into one intense experience. If this experience fails to be recognized as an emanation of the self, one will once again plunge even further into samsara, and the *Bardo* of Rebirth will begin. Enlightenment is at hand if one succeeds in avoiding becoming swallowed by the panorama of human emotion. The goal rather is to view it all with wise detachment, with the recognition that all of these experiences, as terrifying or sublime as they may be, come from the wells of one's own soul, and not from outside. Enlightenment is forever at everyone's disposal; it was not only available at the moment of Clear Light. It is available at all times, during life, at the moment of death and beyond. It is never out of reach. The moment of the Clear Light of Death offers a special opportunity, but it is important to understand that this is not the only moment of opportunity. Throughout the *Bar do thos grol*, the reader is compassionately reminding his or her audience that even though they may find themselves in the next *bardo*, an indication that liberation was not achieved in the previous one, all is never lost, for liberation is available here too. One has only to recognize it. Recognition is what enlightenment is all about.

The Clear Light dissolves after but a moment of its appearance or perhaps after many days depending on the subject's level of achievement in his or her practice during their lifetime. The internal deities now begin their dramatic performance.

The first group that arises in the mind are what have come to be known as the peaceful deities. Their nature is one of "completely encompassing peace, immovable, invincible peace, the peaceful state that cannot be challenged, that has no age, no end, no beginning." (Fremantle, 13). This peace that they embody is the openness and blissfulness of one's own nature, the kind that invites "the notion of oneness with the universe" (Fremantle, 13). It is a state that most people have experienced in their lives, some more often than others; a state that looks outward to the entire world with hope and joy and a sense of the interconnectedness of all, a state that cannot be polluted by the vagaries of this potentially harsh world. This is the state of mind that gives birth to the peaceful deities. They will appear one by one before the deceased in his or her consciousness, each one offering the opportunity to recognize them as being manifestations of one's inner self. They will each rise and quickly pass away, like a phantom parade in the mind, all of them coming from within.

In his commentary on the text, Carl Jung interpreted these manifestations as being the expressions of the eternal archetypes of the human psyche, each one coming into full view at this crucial time after death. The archetypes are the contents of what he calls the Collective Unconscious. The Collective Unconscious is that part of the psyche which does not owe its existence to personal experience, but rather is purely a result of heredity. He argues that it is a part of the self of which the ego has not been conscious. It is the

consciousness of the deep recesses of the human mind that is universally present always and everywhere (Campbell, 60). The archetypes that make up the contents of this Collective Unconscious are the motifs, categories of imagination or the pre-existent forms that are found expressed all around the world in mythology, narrative, religion etc. It is precisely these primitive and inherited archetypes that Jung believes come forth to the subject at this time of death. The peaceful deities and the wrathful demons that are described in the *Bar do thos grol* are nothing other than the Collective Unconscious manifested. When the layers of civilization are stripped away, the naked mind, the Jungian Collective Unconscious, shines through with all its brilliance and ancient history. Whether or not one adopts the Jungian terminology, whether or not one labels these creatures of the mind as archetypes or deities, the result is the same, for both in fact are saying that these manifestations arise directly out of the contents of the mind. Jung believes them to be ancient motifs, but the Tibetan view is not necessarily so different. They are ancient, and yet very present.

Despite this similarity between Jung's archetypes and the deities' emergence in this *bardo* however, one must not make the mistake of assuming that the intention behind the *Bar do thos grol* is one of mere psychology. While these deities may well fit Jung's description of the contents of the Collective Unconscious, to the average Tibetan, the events described in the *Bar do thos grol* consist of much more than the contents of one's unconscious. These events go beyond the mind, transcend the limits of the realm of the unconscious. They are the events of the fundamental nature of the self, and this nature is not found in one's head. Moreover, it is important to recognize that although much of this

work lends itself well to the psychologist's arena, the intention of the work is certainly to be taken much more literally. In the Tibetan world view, the experience being described is very real, very literal. For the Tibetan, the soul of the deceased is literally experiencing the events of the *bardos*. It literally exists out of body after death and continues to experience and exist. Death does not mark the end of experience; rather it marks only the end of experience in that one particular body. Existence however, goes on. Jung found in the *Bar do thos grol* a wonderful parallel to his own thought and world view, but it is only a parallel which may have been helpful for him as he grappled with this text; it is not an equivalence.

The first of the deities to appear in this *bardo* is Vairocana. Vairocana is described as having neither back nor front and is completely white in color, wearing white robes and is seated on a white throne, the only contrast being provided by his lustrous black hair. His name means "Illuminator," for he is the color of "sunlight on snow" (Vessantara, 119). White is the all-pervading color for it contains all the colors of the rainbow within it, yet it itself has no tinge or hue. He represents a completely "decentralized notion of panoramic vision: both center and fringe are everywhere. It is complete openness of consciousness, transcending the skandha of consciousness" (Fremantle, 16). He is that part of the mind that is open and blissful with all that is, however he may also bring with him a kind of aggression, for it often does not take one long to become destabilized by such openness. If the ego cannot separate itself from this openness, it can become angry and afraid and seek a center again, a distinction. If this becomes the case, if the mind does not seek refuge in Vairocana but rather becomes angry with what he represents, the next vision will swiftly

appear. It is all too easy to choose the familiar rather than this foreign sense of emptiness. The text warns of this, but whether or not one chooses to listen is entirely in the subject's hands. It begs the mind not to be distracted, to remain focused on the teachings and remember that the light of Vairocana is not something to become afraid of. It begs the hearer to be inspired by the following prayer:

> When through intense ignorance I wander in samsara,
> on the luminous light-path of the dharmadatu wisdom,
> may blessed Vairocana go before me,
> his consort the Queen of Vajra Space behind me;
> help me to cross the bardo's dangerous pathway
> and bring me to the perfect buddha state.
> (Fremantle, 42)

The hope therefore is that the deceased will move towards the all-embracing light of Vairocana, but the chances are that he or she will not. The next deity is thus encountered: Aksobhya.

Aksobhya literally means "Immovable," and he holds in his hand the vajra scepter: the unobstructable weapon. He is sitting on an elephant throne and carries with him the most powerful weapon on earth. He is the pure expression of solidity. Vessantara describes him as completely conveying "unshakable confidence. He is so rooted that nothing could ever ruffle his composure" (Vessantara, 71). Mirror-like rays emanate from his body and shine on all things equally. He therefore represents one's capacity to see the world as it really is, the courage and the solid strength to look upon all things, the beautiful and the ugly, and recognize them for what they are. The elephant throne represents his wisdom to reflect the world as only a mirror can, impartially and unaffected; "none of the reflections in a mirror stick to it, none are repelled by it. The mirror never

reacts. It always stays imperturbable, immutable" (Vessantara, 79). This is mirror-like wisdom.

However, if this kind of wisdom was not practiced during the *Bardo* of This Life, the mind may become upset by it during the intermediate *bardo*. This mirror-like wisdom requires a critical mind, one that may look upon the world and see what is wrong with it, and not just what is right. This kind of mind is solid and firmly rooted, but the mind that cannot look upon the world so evenly may experience a serious feeling of paranoia by such a light. It will become too upsetting to see the wrongs of the world, and so one will refuse Aksobhya's presence rather than seek refuge in it. One will reject the beautiful rays that Aksobhya creates and he will fade as quickly as he arose. The next deity thereupon will dawn.

Ratnasambhava is the Jewel-Producing One. He is abundantly wealthy, beyond the dreams of avarice. In the realm of Ratnasambhava, there are no bounds either to his riches or to his generosity. He gives and gives to all equally, to all who come by his path, and his resources never diminish. He is the source of limitless wealth and limitless giving. He is also associated with the earth, for the earth is the great leveler: the earth absorbs everything and everyone equally; everything comes from the earth and to the earth shall everything return. Ratnasambhava therefore represents the Wisdom of Sameness, the wisdom to give equally without ever making distinctions.

Such wisdom is very difficult to uphold. The trap of dualism, of making distinctions is ever-present. Judging the world and oneself is a poisonous companion that most carry by their side. It is therefore all too easy for the mind not to be comfortable with

Ratnasambhava's presence of Sameness, and thus for it to fall into the trap of pride or insecurity, these being two sides of the same coin. The ego cannot accept being handled equally, but rather yearns for some kind of different status and attention. To accept a Wisdom of Sameness is to kill the ego, it is to release oneself of pride and insecurity and embrace equality. But more often than not, the ego prevails. Ratnasambhava disappears and the next experience begins.

Amitabha is the Buddha of Boundless Light. He is described as being ruby-red in color and he holds a lotus in his hand. He is the buddha of infinite compassion and love, openness and warmth. The lotus flower he holds in his hand has the special quality of opening both with the infiltration of sunlight and of moonlight, "so any situation coming from outside is accepted. It also has the quality of complete purity; such compassion could grow in mud or dirt but the flower is completely perfect and clean" (Fremantle, 20). It is a compassion that falls on all beings and loves all beings equally. Unlike Ratnasambhava's Wisdom of Sameness however, Amitabha embodies a Wisdom of Distinction in that his love and compassion shines on each being uniquely, on distinctive characteristics and special traits. He loves each separately and specially, but this does not lead to any kind of attachment, for his love is non-dual. He represents a love without hunger.

This kind of love may be difficult to bear, difficult to express. It is a request for the dissolution of one's feelings of desperation and unlovableness, for one's restlessness to be calmed. Again though, if this was not practiced during one's lifetime, it is likely that that which Amitabha represents will emerge more as an assault than as an expression of the

pure self. His light will be too bright to bear and consequently, he will dissolve. The final peaceful deity, Amoghasiddhi, will take his place.

Amoghasiddhi is painted a dark, peaceful green. He is the color of nature and tranquillity. He holds his left hand up, palm facing outward and fingers pointing skyward. This is the mudra known as 'fearlessness'. He is the embodiment of an authority not based on terror; he is calm authority itself. Amoghasiddhi's wisdom is known as the Wisdom of Accomplishment, for he is the Buddha of action and efficiency. In his posture of authority, this Buddha acts upon the world as he sweeps through it with his bird-like carriers. He is that aspect of Sakyamuni that could not be overrun by Angulimala the bandit, but rather calmly confronted him with strength and sureness. He is the Buddha that overcomes fear and takes action on all, the one that dives into the midnight depths of the self, finds the blueprint of the self's potential and is prepared to work on its weakest and embryonic aspects (Vessantara, 111).

To dive as Amoghasiddhi requests, to take action with authority and fearlessness, these are no easy tasks. It would surely be easier to fall apart in confusion. Either one finds the power to act on a situation, recognize what is at hand, or tremble in confusion and become afraid. These are the options Amoghasiddhi presents.

Amoghasiddhi does not have any inherent or independent existence outside of the subject's mind. He is rather a manifestation of the capacity that lies within, an expression of the mind itself. As with the deities that appeared before him, Amoghasiddhi is the roadway to actualizing the potential of the naked self, but if this potential remains unrecognized, if the mind remains unaware that Amoghasiddhi is in fact itself, the

opportunity presented by Amoghasiddhi will fade. Amoghasiddhi is the last of the peaceful opportunities. If his embrace is refused, one will continue spiraling downwards, into the realm of the wrathful ones. The mind is now degenerating quickly as it fails to recognize what it really is: a manifestation of infinite light, compassion, love and strength.

The realm of the wrathful deities now dawns. It is a realm of blood-drinkers who will quickly seek to terrify and overwhelm the mind as each one bombards it with their awful gruesomeness. They will present violence and pain, torture and unspeakable terror. They will give visual expression to parts of the self that it itself did not even know existed. These creatures are none other than the peaceful deities transformed, the peaceful aspects of the self metamorphosed into terror that rips bodies apart, drinks blood, chews on intestines and laughs as others cry. They are the nightmares of the self just as the peaceful ones were the dreams. Both the peaceful and the wrathful are projections of one's own mind; they are all manifestations of who one really is.

The wrathful deities are fifty-two in number. Each one appears as an image of horror and then disappears just as quickly. The mind has barely a moment to recognize them before they fade away. Just as with the peaceful deities, one need only recognize them as being expressions of the psyche in order to gain liberation, but recognition becomes more and more difficult as one sinks deeper into the quagmire of these thoughts. It is always easier to become afraid than it is to understand. The text repeatedly explains to the subject that these visions ought to be embraced rather than rejected, but such strength and courage are difficult to summon:

> Do not be afraid of [the wrathful deity], do not be terrified, do not be bewildered. Recognize him as the form of your own mind. He is your yidam, so do not be afraid... Recognition and liberation are simultaneous (Fremantle, 60).

Even though the text explains the truth behind these visions, the deceased does not necessarily understand it. The visions are abhorrent and frightening, and they become even more so as the descent continues. There are demons drinking blood out of skull-cups, holding entrails in their hands, eating bodies, tearing them apart, snarling, laughing, drooling. They overwhelm one with their size, their smell, their faces. They appear quickly, one after the next like a parade of evil, shoving their images in the mind's face. And yet, they are not evil, they are not even demons or deities. They are oneself, and recognizing them as thus will set one free. This is their purpose, this is their truth.

> The Lords of Death too arise out of your own radiant mind, they have no solid substance. Emptiness cannot be harmed by emptiness. Be certain that the external peaceful and wrathful deities, the blood-drinking herukas, the animal-headed deities, the rainbow light, the terrifying forms of the Lords of Death and so on have no substantiality, they only arise out of the spontaneous play of your mind. If you understand this, all fear is naturally liberated, and merging inseparably you will become a buddha (Fremantle, 69).

Even with such constant warnings and compassionate explanations as these however, it may very well be that the subject could not get beyond his or her attachments and fears. It may be that at no point during this journey could one take a step back from these apparitions and recognize them for who and what they are. If this be the case, then the opportunities presented by the *Bardo* of the Experiencing of Reality will come to an end. The door to this realm will close and the door to the next *bardo*, the *Bardo* of Rebirth, will open and beckon the self forward.

The *Srid pa Bar do*: The *Bardo* of Rebirth

The deities have given their final performance. The curtain has fallen and the subject is left alone once more. The opportunities the deities presented were not grasped, and so they fade behind the curtain on the stage of the mind. The descent then begins into the next and final *bardo*, the *Bardo* of Rebirth.

Throughout the journey in the two previous *bardos*, the Tibetan view is that the mind is still unaware of the fact of death. The performance of the deities is experienced as something very real, physical and external. There has been no indication that the physical body is no longer at one's disposal. Thus, in a purely mental body, the mind sails through the air assuming that it still has a body, that life has not yet come to an end. This is one of the reasons for which the experience of the deities is so poignant: one has not come to terms with one's own immaterial nature, and therefore one continues to assume, just as one surely had in life, that everything seen and felt is externally very real. The mind is believed to go back to the places most familiar, seek its old possessions and friends. Because the deceased at this point consists only of a mental body, it can travel at unlimited speed and go through solid barriers. It is completely unobstructable, can "circle the four continents and Mount Meru in an instant and arrive anywhere [it] wants instantaneously as soon as [it] thinks of it, or in the time it takes a man to stretch out and draw back his hand" (Fremantle, 74). It can see and hear everything in its environment, but unfortunately, although it may not realize it yet, the world cannot see or hear it in return. The self has become a floating consciousness, directed by the power of its karma. It therefore does not so much choose where it goes while in this state, but rather is projected

along by the force of previous actions and tendencies. As Kalu Rinpoche explains, this *bardo* is called the "karmic" *bardo* of becoming for "it is an entirely automatic or blind result of... previous actions or karma, and nothing that occurs here is a conscious decision on the part of the being; we are simply buffeted around by the force of karma" (Sogyal Rinpoche, 288). One may say this about most of the moments in any one of the *bardos*, but this becomes particularly true at this point.

As one is thrown about in this mental realm, it becomes harder and harder to take advantage of the opportunities for enlightenment. The karmic force is strong now, and so the potential to break free and recognize reality becomes a more difficult objective. The opportunity is still there, as it always is in one form or another, but it becomes harder to grab it as one is thrown turbulently along.

Eventually, the realization of death strikes. Although the mind is desperately trying to interact with the world as it once had, it does not take long to realize that the world is not interacting back. Possessions are being sold or divided among friends and family, one's seat at the table is no longer being served a plate of food, one's bed may even be slept in by someone else. The pain of this realization is described as being like the pain of a fish wriggling on hot sand. The emotions of feeling replaced, lost and alone suddenly well up. The text describes this state as the "great tornado of karma, terrifying, unbearable, whirling fiercely" (Fremantle, 75) pushing the self from behind, forcing it to sway in all directions. The tornado rips control out of one's hands and throws the self around mercilessly. One becomes terrified and tries to run away, to break free from this overwhelming karmic power, but so often, to no avail. The controlling karmic wind comes

from within, and therefore offers no freedom from it. To fear it and try to escape it is indeed to fear and try to escape oneself. The karmic wind throwing the self around is a tornado of all the aggression, passion and ignorance carried around during one's life. The more of it there was during the *Bardo* of Life, the more there will be in the *Bardo* of Rebirth. It is said in Tibet that fishermen, butchers and hunters are attacked viciously during this time by monstrous versions of their former victims (Sogyal Rinpoche, 291). They relive what they have done during their lives, for they continue to carry around the poisons that led them to those actions. Until they cleanse themselves of these toxins, they will remain chained to the cycle of samsara. The same is true, to one degree or another, of every sentient being.

According to the *Bar do thos grol*, as soon as one absorbs the fact that one is dead and no longer possesses a physical body, frustration and fear set in. Despite the endless kinds of suffering everyone experiences in the *Bardo* of Life, it is nevertheless a familiar place, a familiar territory, and most long to return to it. The mind immediately yearns for a body of its own; thus does the quest begin to find an appropriate one. Liberation would involve recognizing the cycle it has partaken in for so long and choosing to be free of it, but generally, by this point in the cycle, the choice has been made for the opposite solution. The mind chooses not to be free but to continue in a cycle that is safe in its eyes. Some do achieve liberation here, but many do not. Many choose to go on in samsara instead.

As the desire for rebirth becomes stronger, one is propelled towards one's future parents like metal to magnet. Rebirth is not so much chosen as it is an attraction one is

drawn to due to previous karma and tendencies. The parents one is propelled towards quickly come into focus just as they are copulating. A well of emotions are said to arise at this time. The mind becomes frustrated at being formless and alone; it desires a body, interaction with others. The anger, resentment, attachment and frustration all grow larger and with more intensity until the mental body "explodes" and immediately finds itself in a mother's womb. Rebirth is on its way to fruition once again. Mara is the conquering hero for one more round.

The *Bar do thos grol* is many things at once. It is a description of the cycle of existence, a plea for freedom, an exploration of consciousness, a suggested means towards achieving enlightenment. It is a journey believed to be traveled by every human being, forever. Despite the traps and the countless failures it anticipates, a spirit of hope endures, for there is always another opportunity for liberation, there is always another door. No failure is beyond redemption.

CHAPTER II

The Tractate Mourning

The *Tractate Mourning* is sometimes considered to be a minor tractate of the Babylonian Talmud, but it is possibly post-talmudic, dated in approximately the eighth century. Not much more is known about the authorship or genesis of the text, nor do we come across the kind of legendary creation for it as we have for *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Rather, the most that may be said today about the *Tractate Mourning* is that it is possibly Talmudic, and is considered as the oldest Rabbinic text on death and mourning. Texts on death and mourning in Judaism certainly do not begin and end with this text; an enormous death and mourning literature has evolved over the centuries, and the death and mourning rites have evolved too. We will therefore find that certain practices discussed in this tractate are no longer applicable in most parts of the world today, and many practices known today are not discussed in the text. Basically, the *Tractate Mourning* is far from an exhaustive manual on death and mourning rites in the Jewish tradition. It is however, the earliest text we have and therefore will be the focus of this chapter.

Before beginning a detailed analysis of this text, it is important to explain one of its confusing aspects: the order in which it has been structured. Mourning rites in Judaism are very precise and logical in their intended stream of events. The modern reader would assume that the structure of the text would follow the chronological order of these rites. We will find however, that the text is structured thematically rather than chronologically. The text begins with a discussion of how one is to treat a dying man. Thereafter follow a few chapters about who one can and cannot mourn for. Chapter IV discusses how and for whom a priest is to mourn, and chapters V to VIII focus on the period of *shiv'ah*, the first

seven days of mourning. Chapter IX discusses the act of *keri'ah*, the rending of garments, and the period of *sheloshim*, which is the period of the first thirty days of mourning. The next chapter makes a chronological return to *aninut*, the period of time before interment has taken place, and finally, the last four chapters discuss burial and ossilegium rites. In a modern text, we would find the subject of *aninut* discussed at the beginning along with burial practices, and *shiv'ah* and *sheloshim* discussed thereafter. Here however, the text is structured differently. Chronological ordering of texts is a relatively new phenomenon. In earlier times, structure was manufactured differently. The chronological order of the mourning rites as described in this text are: 1) *aninut*, 2) interment, 3) *shiv'ah* and 4) *sheloshim*.

Chapter I

The *Tractate Mourning* begins by discussing how one is to treat a *gosess*, a dying person. A dying person has all the rights of the living; indeed, a dying person is still alive, and thus a legal or moral distinction may not be made between a living person and a dying person, only between a living person and a corpse. This law certainly prevents any abuse of the dying; they, their possessions and their social status are protected by Jewish law until the moment they depart from this world. This is certainly a comfort to the *gosess*.

The law stipulates that "a dying man[1] is considered the same as a living man in every respect" (Sm. I:1)[2]. He may marry or divorce, may take part in religious offerings,

[1] Since the *Tractate Mourning*, as well as most of the other texts being used for this chapter, speak only in the male voice, and since many of the mourning laws regard men only, this chapter will designate a male voice to the mourner as well as to the *gosess* and to any other party involved.

and may inherit and transfer property. Only at the moment of death, and never before, does a man surrender his rights of the living.

The text further instructs not to close a dying man's eyes, bind his jaw, stop his orifices or wash his body until death has arrived (Sm. I:2-4). These are the actions performed on a corpse, but a dying man is not yet a corpse, and one must be scrupulous not to take one for the other. To perform any of these actions before death has occurred is equivalent to manslaughter. The *Shulhan Arukh*, one of the most important legal documents of Jewish tradition written by Rabbi Joseph Caro in the sixteenth century, says, "whosoever closes [the dying person's] eyes before death is regarded as one who sheds blood" (Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 339:1). Rabbi Meir compared a dying man to a flickering lamp: "the moment one touches it he puts it out. So too, whoever closes the eyes of a dying man is accounted as though he has snuffed out his life" (Sm. I:4). Thus, anyone who treats the *gosess* as a corpse and performs any one of the post-mortem rituals before death is committing murder and is liable to the death penalty (Goldberg, 43).

One is further not permitted to rend one's clothes, bare one's shoulders or eulogize the dying man before death has occurred (Sm. I:5). These are all post-mortem rituals that will be discussed below. Basically, it is strongly commanded not to conduct oneself as though the dying man is already dead, for this is both inappropriate and unfair. Furthermore, it may actually lead the dying man to death through the power of suggestion or despair. For this reason, these actions are equivalent to committing murder.

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[2] 'Sm.' will henceforth be used when referencing the *Tractate Mourning*, from its euphemistic Hebrew title, *Semahot*

The next part of this chapter and the first half of the following chapter are concerned with the cases of death in which the funeral rites are suspended. According to the text, no burial rites whatsoever are to be observed for "a dismembered fetus, a footling, a miscarried fetus, a living eight-months baby, or a stillborn nine-months baby" (Sm. I:8). In the time of this text, infant mortality rates were surely quite high, and thus it may be said that the absence of rites in these cases was practical and even compassionate. To request full rites for every faulty pregnancy in the middle ages would surely have been too painful, expensive, and inconvenient. Thus, the above deaths, according to the text, do not receive rites of any kind. The disposal of these infant bodies is not discussed anywhere in this text.

Another case of death in which funeral rites are suspended is in the case of the death of a heathen or a slave, although "one may join in the lament, 'Alas, O lion! Alas, O mighty one!'" (Sm. I:9). Further in the text, slaves are compared to cattle; it is for this reason that a master is not to receive condolences for his slave (Sm. I:10). However, there is almost as much discussion supporting the law that slaves are not to be mourned as there is discussion rejecting it. When Rabban Gamaliel's slave Tebi, died, he is reported to have accepted condolences, for his servant Tebi "was not like other servants. He was virtuous"(Sm. I:10). The law on this subject can be interpreted to go in either direction.

Chapter II

The next kind of unusual death considered is suicide. The text rules that no rites whatsoever are to be observed in such a case (Sm. II:1). It then goes into detail about which deaths are to be considered as suicides.

It is made abundantly clear in all works of the Jewish tradition that Judaism is a life-affirming tradition. Life is considered to be sacred, for it is in essence the breath of God. When God made Adam out of the dust of the ground, "He blew into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). To destroy life is therefore to destroy a part of God, His very own breath which He poured into every living being on Earth. It is for this reason that suicide is equivalent to committing a murder. Indeed, some may argue that it is even worse. The *Tractate Mourning* condemns the act of suicide by ruling that "no rites whatsoever should be observed" (Sm. I:1). The *Shulhan Arukh* similarly rules that a suicide

> is not attended to at all; and one does not mourn for him and no lamentation is made for him, nor does one rend [garments] or bare [the shoulder in mourning for him], but one stands for him in the line [of comforters], and one recites over him the mourner's blessing... (Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 345:1)

To accept a suicide is the equivalent to accepting a form of deicide, for it is the murder of a piece of God. No religion could ever condone such an act.

Criminals condemned to death by the state are not considered suicides, for even though they might have known that committing their crime could lead to execution, this does not equate to intentionally taking one's own life. We therefore find that criminals are not to be denied any funerary rites (Sm. II:9). As a gloss to the *Shulhan Arukh* states, "one who stole or robbed, as a result of which was executed by government law, is to be mourned for, if no danger will [result] through him on account of the fear of the government; and he is not designated a willful suicide" (Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 345:2). One may mourn even a criminal so long as the mourning does not endanger the living.

However, a criminal executed by the Rabbinic court is to be denied all rites of mourning. Even more, the text dictates that the brothers and relatives should greet the witnesses and the judges, "as if to say, 'We bear you no ill will, for you have rendered a true judgment'" (Sm. II:6). For the Rabbinic court to condemn someone to death is considered therefore to be just and righteous, for the ruling is made according to God's decree. A sentencing made by the state court is different, for it is made in accordance with human laws; divine laws are altogether something else. The relatives may grieve a man condemned by the Sanhedrin, but they may not mourn, "for grief is a matter of the heart" (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Book of Judges I:9). The court that sentenced the criminal to death is forbidden to taste food during that entire day (Sm. II:6).

Another case in which one may absolutely not grieve or hold rites, under any circumstances, is for the one who has severed all ties with his people. The law goes so far as to say that the family of the deceased should dress in white, the color of celebration, and that they should eat, drink, and be merry "for an enemy of God has perished. As it is written, 'Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee? And do not I strive with those that rise up against Thee? I hate them with utmost hatred; I count them mine enemies' (Ps. 139:21-22)" (Sm. II:8). The law is harsh toward suicides, for they have turned their backs on God. For criminals sentenced to death for their crimes by the state, no rites are withheld, even if they be murderers. For criminals sentenced to execution by the Sanhedrin, rites are suspended, but the mourners may grieve openly. The only people for whom the law shows no mercy and furthermore even expresses hatred are for those who have turned their backs on their own people. Not only are their deaths not mourned, their

deaths are celebrated as a victory. The *Shulhan Arukh* rules that an excommunicant is to be adjudged "as one who committed suicide willfully" (Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 345:4). Excommunication is nothing less than willful death, and it is hated as no other crime. Betrayal is deemed the worst crime of all.

Chapter III

In this chapter we find a discussion about how old one must be in order to qualify for a complete funeral and the following mourning rites. We have seen that for a miscarried fetus, a living eight-months baby or a stillborn nine-months baby, no rites are observed. However, a nine-month infant who lived even but a moment may be interred. An infant that was born prematurely at eight months or earlier and dies does not qualify for any rites at all. However, a baby that was carried to term and emerged from the womb is considered to be a full living person and may be buried according to ritual to a certain extent. The text explains that "a one-day old infant who died is, to his father, mother and all his relatives, like a full-fledged bridegroom" (Sm. III:1). He may be carried to the cemetery in a towel and buried. The child may be given a name and, if male, may even be circumcised during the washing of the corpse. However, for such an infant, a community procession is not necessary, nor is a eulogy.

An infant thirty days or older is considered to be a viable human being, and thus no rites whatsoever are withheld at this point. Depending on his or her size and age, the infant is taken out in either a casket or a coffin, but the ritual remains the same: an infant thirty days and older is mourned as any other full living being. There is a procession, the

mourner's benediction is recited and there are post-funerary mourning rites to be observed. For a child "who knew how to manage his affairs [he] should be eulogized in his own right" (Sm. III:5). In other words, a child may be eulogized if he had matured to the point that he could be considered accountable for his actions. Until then, no eulogy is necessary, or a eulogy may be delivered about the parent's actions and lives.

Chapter IV

This chapter is concerned with the laws regarding those for whom the ancient lineage of Temple priests, i.e. the Kohanim, may mourn and defile themselves. Judaism believes that a corpse ritually defiles the place in which it is laid before burial. Rabbi Abner Weiss, an important rabbi of the twentieth century, compares this defilement to radiation. He states that "although it is invisible, ritual defilement radiates in all directions from its source, the lifeless body. Ritual impurity actually fills the dwelling occupied by the Jewish corpse" (Weiss, 28). He and other scholars trace this belief to being a kind of reaction to the religions surrounding Judaism in earlier times, most notably the ancient Egyptian religion. However, this cannot as yet be verified. The idea is based on the fact that the ancient Egyptian culture is considered today to have been a death-centered religion. According to Weiss, "the primary function of their priests related to the burial of the dead" (Weiss, 29), and the Jewish reaction seems to have been to arrange it so that the priests of its own culture function completely differently: whereas the Egyptian priests dealt primarily with the dead, the Jewish priests are forbidden, with a few exceptions, to have contact with the dead.

Rabbi Maurice Lamm, another important rabbi of the modern era, gives a more philosophical explanation for this phenomenon. He argues that Judaism, as a life-affirming religion, honors and respects the dead, but it does not condone the love of death. According to Lamm, "to *worship* the dead is a monstrous blasphemy. For there is a balance...between accepting death and loving it, between honoring the dead and worshipping at their graves" (Lamm, 211). The Temple is a sanctuary and the priests are its servants. Death is to be honored, but it defiles and has no place in the temple of life, and the servants of this temple have no place before a corpse either. It is for this reason that Lamm believes that the Kohanim are restricted from coming into contact with a corpse.

Whether one accepts Lamm's explanation, or Weiss's, or any other, the ultimate justification for this practice is found in the Torah: "The Lord said to Moses: Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: None shall defile himself for any [dead] person among his kin" (Lev. 21:1). In this chapter of the *Tractate Mourning*, we find a long and complicated list of rules by which the Kohanim must abide in regards to death. I will briefly look at some of these.

A priest must defile himself for his mother, his father, his son and daughter, brother and sister and his wife (Sm. IV:1). This law is directly based on the passage in Leviticus 21:2 which states that a Kohen is not defile himself "except for the relatives that are closest to him: his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, and his brother." He is actually *commanded* to put himself in the presence of the corpse under these circumstances. The *Shulhan Arukh* states that "it is a religious duty that he defile himself

for them; and if he does not wish to [do so], he is defiled against his will" (Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 373:3). A Kohen is to be shielded from death, but he must also confront it when it is appropriate. The law will not permit for him to avoid the issues of mortality when circumstances require him to face it.

If there is any doubt as to whether a dead person is indeed his relative, a priest is to abstain from defiling himself (Sm. IV:2); similarly for a woman to whom he is betrothed but not married. For any relative other than the seven immediate kin, he may mourn, but may not defile himself. He further should not defile himself for a sister who is no longer a virgin: "all agree that he should not defile himself for a sister who had been raped or seduced" (Sm. IV:5). Although this last law is difficult to rationalize today, the Torah stipulates it in Lev. 21:3, and thus becomes justified: "also for a virgin sister, close to him because she has not married, for her he may defile himself." One reading of this law may be that before she is married, she is "close to him", but once she is married, she belongs to another household and therefore is no longer "close to him." A Kohen is to defile himself only for those close of kin.

Not only is the law strict and very precise about whom a priest may or may not defile himself for, it is even harsh in its punishment to anyone who does not follow the law as it is written. For defiling oneself against legal proscription, the law commands forty lashes, a standard response to willful violation of a rabbinic law. For example, if the Kohen has entered a cemetery, which he is forbidden to do, he is subject to forty lashes (if his health can withstand it). A Kohen, we learn at this point, may also be defiled by simply entering "a dwelling of heathens, an area inhabited by heathens, or an area of a plowed-up

grave, or if he has left the land of Israel" (Sm. IV:13). In all of these cases, he is to be "flogged into submission." A priest may leave the land of Israel if his circumstances require it, but if no circumstances require him to leave his sacred homeland, and yet he does so, he is to be flogged severely. These punitive laws clearly reflect the sanctity the tradition expects its priests to uphold.

Another way in which a Kohen may be defiled is if he comes into contact with a corpse that is not whole, even if that be his father's corpse. As we have seen, a Kohen may and actually must defile himself for certain members of his direct family. However, if the corpse of this member is not whole, but some part of it has been severed, he may not come into contact with it.

A Kohen is commanded to defile himself in only one other situation: for a *met mitzvah*. A *met mitzvah* is defined in the *Tractate Mourning* as a corpse that does not have enough pallbearers and people to inter it. Maimonides however, defines it as "a body lying on the road with no one to bury it" (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Book of Judges III:8). Regardless of who that person once was, it is considered dishonorable for a corpse not to receive a proper burial. Thus, if a Kohen comes across a corpse that requires his help for an honorable disposal, the laws of defilement are over ruled: the honor of the corpse takes priority. The priest is to defile himself by burying the body, for greater harm is done by leaving a corpse unburied than by becoming temporarily defiled. Rabbi Akiba is cited in the *Tractate Mourning* about this:

> Early one morning I arose and found a slain man. I carried him a distance of three Sabbath limits, until I brought him to a burial place and interred him. When I came and excitedly declared the matter to the Sages, they said to me: 'Every single step that you took is accounted to you as if you had shed blood.' I then applied to

> myself the principle of *a minori ad majus*: Having to do good, I sinned; had I thought to do less - how much more so! (Sm. IV:19).

According to Rabbi Akiba, from that day forward he began to acquire merit.

The priests of the Jewish tradition are the emblems of life itself. They are the representatives of the life-affirming nature of Judaism. They are interlinked with all that is sacred and holy, and life, the most sacred and holy of all gifts, is their domain. However, they are to take part in death when it is appropriate, when a close relative dies or one needs their assistance. They are life-affirming, but not to the extent of negating the truth of death.

Chapter V

In this chapter, we are introduced to the concept of *shiv'ah*. As soon as the body has been buried, the period known as *shiv'ah* begins. *Shiv'ah*, the Hebrew word for 'seven', is a period of seven days during which the mourner is completely surrounded by his or her community and devotes that time entirely to grieving, to feeling the pain of loss and to remembering the recently departed. The mourner may not work, may not take part in any kind of celebration, and may not study Torah. The mourner may only mourn.

It is believed that the concept of *shiv'ah* is as old as Judaism itself. We find quite a few pieces of evidence for it in the Torah. In Genesis 7:10, we learn that the flood overwhelmed the world on the seventh day after God decreed it. Although the text itself does not link this seventh day to the seven days of mourning, the Talmud midrashically interprets these days before the flood as "the days of mourning for Methuselah, thus teaching that the lamentation for the righteous postpones retribution... God himself

mourned seven days for the destruction of the world" (Sanhedrin 108b). More to the point, when Joseph mourned his father Jacob, it is said that "he ordained a seven-day mourning period for his father" (Gen. 50:10). Although Joseph mourns for his father seven days and then afterwards buries him, and the *shiv'ah* ritual begins only after the body has been interred, what may be seen here are the origins of this practice. This reference actually implies that the practice of *shiv'ah* is older than Judaism! Finally, a special time for mourning is referred to by Amos, as he declares: "I will turn your festivals into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring sackcloth upon all loins and baldness upon every head; and I will make [the land] as if in mourning for an only [son], and its end like a bitter day" (Amos 8:10). Just as feasts are to last seven days, so shall mourning. Thus, it has come to be believed that "from the earliest moments of recorded Jewish history, the Jewish people have observed *shiv'ah* for deceased relatives as 'days of bitterness'" (Lamm, 87).

The first rule put forth in the *Tractate Mourning* about *shiv'ah* regards work: "a mourner is forbidden to engage in work throughout the seven days of mourning: he, his sons, his daughters, his slaves, his bondsmaids, and his cattle" (Sm. V:1). Anything or anyone that belongs to the mourner is, like himself, forbidden to work. A mourner's family, his servants and his animals are all an extension of himself, and therefore are restricted as is he.

The law prohibiting work during *shiv'ah* is not absolute. If the restriction on working would cause irreparable loss, work is permitted by any one of the members of the household. However, absolutely necessary work may be done. For example, if the

mourner is in the process of pressing olives when the death of a relative takes place, he may complete the process immediately, if that is the only way of preventing spoiling (Sm. V:3). The text also makes an exception for someone whose work is a vital necessity for the public. For example, "if he is the only baker in town or the only shopkeeper in town, he may carry on privately out of regard for the public" (Sm. V:7). Laborers engaged by the mourner may not work for him during his week of mourning, however they themselves are not prohibited from working in their own homes during this time.

Aside from the prohibition against work, a mourner is prohibited from many other activities during the week of *shiv'ah*. Three alluded to in this chapter are the prohibitions against cutting one's hair, washing oneself or one's clothes and wearing shoes. The latter two are explicitly stated in the following chapter, but I will discuss them here.

Maimonides explains that the reason behind the law prohibiting cutting one's hair during mourning comes from the passage in the Torah when Aaron and his remaining sons are commanded not to leave their hair unshorn at the death of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:6). Maimonides explains that

> we infer therefrom that any other mourner is forbidden to cut the hair, but must let it grow. Just as he is forbidden to cut the hair of his head, so he is forbidden to cut the hair of his beard or of any part of the body (Maimonides, Book of Judges, 176).

The *Tractate Mourning* explains in regards to this that, if a mourner is stricken by a few deaths in a row, since he is forbidden to cut his hair during the period of *shiv'ah*, he may crop his hair with a knife or clippers, but not with shears, if this is necessary (Sm. V:10). The law prohibiting cutting hair during *shiv'ah* is herein taken for granted.

In the same vein, it is explained that, since a mourner's clothes may not be washed during mourning, he may rinse them with water, if he is to be mourning a few deaths consecutively, but may not scour them with urine (urine was a common medium for scouring, along with sand and aloe). In other words, for hygienic reasons, he may rinse, but he may not do more than is necessary. The same applies for the washing of his body. If he is mourning longer than one week, he may rinse but not wash. Maimonides traces these laws to the passage from II Sam. 14:2, in which David is advised by Joab to pretend to be a mourner if he wants to be reunited with Absalom, to wear garments of mourning and not to anoint himself with oil. From this passage, Maimonides concludes that

> A mourner is forbidden to anoint even part of his body. If, however, it is his purpose to remove filth, he is permitted to do it. He is also forbidden to wash even part of his body with warm water, but he may wash his face, hands, and feet, though not the entire body, with cold water (Mishneh Torah, Book of Judges, V:4).

Finally, a mourner is not permitted to wear shoes. He must be barefoot. The text tells us that the mourner is permitted to wear shoes only when traveling, but as soon as he reaches the city limits, he "must take them off" (Sm. V:12). Zlotnick explains in his introduction that the reason a mourner is permitted to wear shoes while traveling outside the city limits is for safety:

> a barefoot mourner walking through a Gentile city was apparently another cause for jeers. No documentation is need to show that what may have had its beginning in name-calling or flinging of stones often ended in tragedy. As a result, it was decreed that shoes need not be removed until the traveler had entered the street inhabited by Jews (Zlotnick, 13).

The origins of this law is traced by Maimonides to Ezek. 24:17, in which Ezekiel is in mourning and yet commanded not to practice any mourning rites. Subsequently, he is

commanded: "place your shoes upon your feet." This implies, according to Maimonides, "that all other mourners are forbidden to do it" (Mishneh Torah, Book of Judges, V:6).

It is important to understand that, despite these scriptural explanations for these laws, there are also more psychological explanations provided by the tradition. Rabbi Lamm explains that personal pleasures are to be denied the mourner during the period of *shiv'ah*, for this is a period that is to be focused on grieving and remembering the dead. It is also a time for self-reflection. It is therefore not a time for pleasure or comfort. It is for this reason that the text commands not to cut one's hair, bathe or wear shoes, for these are all expressions of a comfortable life. The unnecessary is discarded in this special time, for the mourner is confronted with the most basic of realities and anything not basic is simply not appropriate. Many more of these unnecessary actions of regular life will be discarded in the laws as the text progresses.

An interesting issue that comes up at this point in the text is the similar status to which mourners and excommunicants are subjected. Both a mourner and an excommunicant are to remain unwashed, disheveled and barefoot, for both are in actuality, mourners: one is mourning a departed individual, and the other is mourning himself. To be isolated from one's community is in effect a kind of death, for who can survive apart and alone? Thus, both the mourner and the excommunicant are considered to be in mourning.

Chapter VI

It is only in chapter VI that the explicit statement about the prohibition against washing and wearing shoes during the period of mourning is made. However, the

prohibition against these is not the first on the list. The chapter begins, "a mourner is forbidden to read from the Torah, the Prophets, or the Writings; to recite Mishnah or Talmud, *Halakhot* or *Aggadot*" (Sm. VI:1). A mourner may not engage in the study of any sacred text for a very simple reason. There is a strong tradition in Judaism, indeed one may say that it is the essence of Judaism itself, that claims that the study of Torah is one of the greatest pleasures. It is the belief that studying the words of God, and the inspired commentaries of these words, are the source of profound joy for any Jew. In a passage from Psalm 19, the Torah is praised: "The teaching of the Lord is perfect, renewing life; the decrees of the Lord are enduring, making the simple wise; the precepts of the Lord are just, rejoicing the heart; the instruction of the Lord is lucid, making the eyes light up" (Ps. 19:8-9). Since, as we have seen, a mourner is not to take part in pleasure of any kind during *shiv'ah*, a mourner is consequently prohibited from taking pleasure in the word of God. This, along with Tish'a beAv, are the only times during which such a prohibition takes place. Rabbi Lamm explains that the study of Scripture is not only prohibited because it is a source of delight, but also because it can serve as "a means of distraction to the mourner sunk in despair" (Lamm, 134). The only parts of Scripture permitted at this time are the Book of Job, Lamentations, and the references to disaster in the Book of Jeremiah (one must skip all passages of consolation in this book), as well as the laws of mourning (Goldberg, 217). The point is keep the mourner's mind on his or her grief and maintain an important level of self-reflection at this time.

If however, this prohibition causes pain to one who has an unquenchable thirst for the study of Torah, the prohibition is lifted, for the purpose of these laws of mourning are

only to restrict pleasure. If they on the contrary result in pain, they no longer serve their purpose; to make the mourner suffer is not the objective of these laws. Therefore we find that a mourner who cannot live without study may nonetheless study at this time. From this exception, we discover the enormous compassion the tradition offers its people. We also discover, from the nature of this very rule included in the mourning rites, the tremendous love the Jewish tradition holds for its Scripture.

Given that all pleasures are to be curbed during this time of grieving, a mourner is naturally prohibited from sexual relations. He is also "required to cover his head and to invert his bed" (Sm. VI:1). The law of covering the head during *shiv'ah* is derived from the same passage that the law of walking barefoot is derived from. Ezekiel is commanded not to act as a mourner and therefore not to "don [his] headgear" (Ezek. 24:17). Very little more is said about this law, except that if covering one's head leads to mockery in an anti-Semitic land, then the practice need not be followed (Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 386:1). This practice is no longer followed today.

The inverting of the bed is another custom no longer followed today. In the days of the *Tractate Mourning*, the custom was to "sit on couches or beds throughout the year. Hence, the mourner is required to overturn his couch and sit on the ground" (Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 387:1, footnote 1). Not only the mourner's bed is to be overturned, but according to Maimonides, "all the beds of his house. Even if he has ten beds in ten houses in ten different cities, it is his duty to overturn them all" (Mishneh Torah, Book of Judges V:18). Although this practice is no longer followed today, we may find an extension of it in modern homes. During *shiv'ah* today, the mourner sits on a low stool,

and this has been interpreted as representing the mourner's lowered emotional state (Riemer, 1995, p.144). The lowness of the stool is a symbol for the low and grieved feelings experienced by the mourner at this time. The mourner may only elevate himself physically as the emotions slowly are raised. This may however, also be an extension of the law requiring mourners to sit on the ground.

The next laws described in the text refer to the first three days of mourning. In his notes, Zlotnick explains that these first three days are particularly intense for the mourner; it is a time "given to lamentation, and the mourner should picture himself as being threatened by a suspended sword. A death in the family is compared to a stone being removed from a pile: when one stone is taken away they all come toppling down" (Zlotnick, 123). Given this heightened vulnerability of the mourner, the mourner is restricted even more during these three initial days than at any other time. For example, the mourner is required during this time to return others' greetings with the words "I am a mourner" (Sm. VI:2). On the third day only may he return the greeting, although it must be in a hushed voice. The sages reasoned that it would be absurd to expect of a mourner to be gracious in his social intercourse; indeed, it would be uncompassionate. According to Rabbi Lamm, "the rejection of greetings at this time, far from betraying a lack of cordiality, issues from a profound insight into man's nature and a deep compassion for his predicament" (Lamm, 122).

Another restriction regards the putting on of the *tefillin* (Sm. VI:3). Donning the *tefillin*, the phylacteries, is one of the most sacred acts a Jewish man may perform. It is a special moment of every observant man's day. The very act of winding these sacred

symbols around oneself is believed to be an act of joy. Consequently, just as the study of Torah is prohibited during *shiv'ah* for it is regarded as an act of pleasure, so the donning of the *tefillin* is prohibited for the same reason. However, the *tefillin* is only to be restricted at the beginning of *shiv'ah*. Whether the restriction applies to the first day of *shiv'ah* or to the first three is a divided question which seems to remain unresolved in many other texts as well.

A mourner is further not permitted to join another funeral procession in his first three days of mourning (Sm. VI:4). At the end of these, he may do so, but must stand in the mourner's row in order to be comforted along with the other mourners. This is indeed a very wise law. In the beginning, it serves to shield the mourner from becoming too overwhelmed in his grief. Thereafter, with the ruling that he is to join the other mourners when he is finally permitted to join a procession, the law is forbidding the mourner to lose his status as a mourner. In other words, this law maintains his position as a mourner in his community, and thus maintains the communal sympathy and support that he requires at this time.

Finally, a mourner is forbidden to enter the Temple Mount during the first two days of mourning (Sm. VI:11). On the third day he may enter and walk around it to the left. The custom was to walk around it to the right; thus, by walking in the opposite direction, the mourner's special status is recognized by the community and they will ask "what's wrong that you're walking to the left?" and he may answer "I am a mourner" (Sm. VI:11). This rule, just as with the rule about how a mourner is to greet others in his community, offers the community an opportunity to recognize mourners and express

concern for them. They are in a very special state, and the tradition respects that state; it creates a context in which that state may be recognized and honored continually. The mourner in this community is never left by the wayside.

Chapter VII

This chapter explains how a mourner is to conduct himself during the Sabbath and festivals. During festivals, mourning for the deceased is interrupted, but not so for the Sabbath. According to the *Tractate Mourning*, "the Sabbath is counted among the days of mourning and does not cut off the mourning period" (Sm. VII:1). Since *shiv'ah* lasts seven days, it is guaranteed that a Sabbath will fall during this time, whereas this is not the case for a festival. During the Sabbath, all public mourning rites are suspended, and so the bereaved is permitted to wear shoes and leave the house for services. He is also required not to wear his rent garment at this time. However, all private mourning rites are still to be observed, and the day counts as one of mourning.

During a festival however, the law is more complex. If the death occurs a day before a festival, the mourner "should suspend mourning during the entire festival and count six days after the festival. If two days before the festival, he should suspend mourning during the entire festival and count five days after the festival" (Sm. VII:2). In other words, mourning is interrupted completely during a festival. Even private mourning rites are to be suspended during this time. The community is generally present for a mourner and it will always direct its attention to him, but the mourner's needs must be superseded by the community's in times of traditional festivity. As Rabbi Lamm explains,

"the spirit of joy that is mandatory on major holidays is not consistent with the sorrow of bereavement... therefore, the holiday completely cancels the *shiv'ah*" (Lamm, 94).

If the mourner began sitting *shiv'ah* three days before the festival began, the law rules that he is to be released from the obligations of *shiv'ah*; if eight days before the festival began, then the mourner is released from the obligations of *sheloshim* (Sm. VII:3). *Sheloshim*, the Hebrew word for 'thirty', is the period of the first thirty days of mourning. Basically, it is the marker that the first month of the rest of the mourner's life has passed without the deceased. During this time, certain mourning rites are to be observed which will be discussed later on in the chapter. The textual justification for these thirty days is traced by Maimonides to the passage, "she shall spend a month's time lamenting her father and her mother" (Deut. 21:13). The *Tractate Mourning* traces *sheloshim* to another passage from the Torah, Deut. 34:8; nevertheless, the idea remains the same. Maimonides infers from Deut. 21:13 that "a mourner should manifest sorrow for thirty days" (Mishneh Torah, Book of Judges VI:1).

One of these rites is that the mourner is not permitted to cut his hair or wash his clothes during the period of thirty days. If however, *shiv'ah* began eight days before a festival, as mentioned previously, the mourning rites of *sheloshim* are interrupted and he may both cut his hair and wash his clothes, although he is permitted to do so only on the eve of the festival. Thereafter, he is not permitted to do so until *sheloshim* has passed (Sm. VII:4). The text also provides direction for one who has buried one's dead two days and seven days before the end of a festival, as well as instructions for the appropriate behavior of the slaves and cattle of the mourner at this time.

For the rest of the chapter, the text explains what is permitted and what is forbidden during the period of *sheloshim*. The first rite to be observed during *sheloshim* is the rite of mourning (Sm. VII:9). The text explains that during *sheloshim*, a mourner must mourn, and this is justified by the passage in Deuteronomy, "And the Israelites bewailed Moses in the steppes of Moab for thirty days" (Deut. 34:8).

Beyond the private mourning, a mourner is forbidden during *sheloshim* the following actions: to wear pressed clothes (Sm. VII:10); to cut hair from any part of his body, as well as to cut his nails (Sm. VII:11); to collect a loan (Sm. VII:12); to arrange a banquet to celebrate a betrothal (Sm. VII:14) and to arrange a wedding feast (Sm. VII:15). From these rules, we may infer that *sheloshim* is an extended and yet more mild form of the *shiv'ah* period. Cutting one's hair and wearing freshly pressed clothes remain forbidden during *sheloshim* as it was during *shiv'ah*, but the mourner need not be restricted to his home during *sheloshim*, and he may greet others openly. He may also wear shoes at this point, study Torah, wear *tefillin* and rest on upright chairs and beds (rather than on inverted ones). He is restricted from celebrations and unnecessary pleasures, but not to the extent of the first seven days of mourning. The transition from *shiv'ah* to *sheloshim* is a gradual easing out of the drama of mourning.

Chapter VIII

The first rule discussed in this chapter regards going out to the cemetery to inspect the dead for life. It is as follows:

> One may go out to the cemetery for thirty days to inspect the dead for a sign of life, without fear that this smacks of heathen practice. For it happened that a man

> was inspected after thirty days, and he went on to live twenty-five years; still another went on to have five children and died later (Sm. VIII:1).

According to Zlotnick, this practice is not considered anywhere else in Rabbinic literature (Zlotnick, 11). It implies that bodies were not buried in the earth, as they are today, for that would assume exhumation. Rather, it may be inferred that bodies were placed in accessible caves at least for the first thirty days, so that they may be inspected for life. The fear of burying someone alive was a widespread concern in the middle ages, and thus allowing for inspection was a way of alleviating this fear. Needless to say, this practice is no longer followed today.

Next, the text deals with the funerary procedures for a bride or groom. It instructs that a deceased bride or groom be carried out under a wedding canopy, and gives a detailed description of which foods are permitted to be hung from the canopy and which are not (Sm. VIII:2-4). It also instructs that, in the case of a bride, she may be carried to her burial place with her hair let down and in the case of a groom, his face may be bared (Sm. VIII:7). Usually, the practice is that the face of the deceased is covered after death, however it has been interpreted by Zlotnick that the face is bared and the hair is loosened in the case of a bride and groom in order to heighten the sorrow. Zlotnick explains that, for deaths which are singularly painful, such as the death of a bride or a groom on their wedding day, special rites are observed. It is for this reason that a bride or groom would be borne under a canopy for example, "as if to say, 'had they been alive the procession would have been that of a wedding'" (Zlotnick, 14).

In the same paragraph, the story of Samuel the Little is counted. It is unclear what this story has to do with the previous information. The story tells of Samuel the Little

asking the assembly if "the key and ledger of a dead man [may] be suspended from his coffin to heighten anguish" (Sm. VIII:7). Since he had no son, the request to suspend a key and ledger from his coffin has been interpreted as being a request for access to the gates of heaven: a son insures admission to eternal life and so without him, a key becomes necessary. From this story we gain insight into a very particular funerary tradition and belief: the tradition of the suspension of a key onto the coffin of one who has left behind no male progeny, and the belief that there are gates of heaven to which admission requires particular circumstances.

From section 8 until the end of this chapter, the text deals with martyrological stories; these represent nearly a complete collection of what is to be found in early Talmudic literature (Zlotnick, 139). It is a collection of wonderful and touching stories about famous martyrs accepting death peacefully, of others dealing with the death of their loved ones calmly and of divine justice rescuing the people of Israel gallantly. Even though these do not directly deal with death rites but are rather merely traditional tales, they belong to the text, and therefore I will summarize some of them.

In the first story, Rabban Simeon and Rabbi Ishmael are sentenced to be executed. Rabbi Ishmael is weeping, and when asked why, he replies "Is it because we are about to be killed that I weep?... I weep because we are being executed like murderers and like Sabbath breakers" (Sm. VIII: 8). He clearly does not see any justice in a world that condemns righteous men as though they were criminals. Rabban Simeon humbly offers a way of approaching the situation: although they have lived righteously, he believes that this in no way certifies that they were perfect and hence do not deserve to die: "Perhaps

while you were dining or while you were sleeping, a woman came to ask for a ruling about her menses, her defilement, or her cleanness, and the servant told her, 'He is sleeping'" (Sm. VII:8). Rabban Simeon seems to be implying that to refuse to help even just once, even unintentionally, is to live less than completely righteously. Despite their imperfection though, they were deeply mourned.

The story of Rabbi Akiba's execution as told in this text is much more dramatic. The famous Rabbi Akiba was not executed simply because his time had come, as does the time of all men righteous or not. Rather, Rabbi Akiba's death is interpreted here as a message, as a sign: "O Israel, our brethren, hear us! Rabbi Akiba has been executed not because he was suspected of robbery or because he did not put all his strength into the study of Torah. Rabbi Akiba has been executed only as a sign..." (Sm. VIII:9). His death is the foreshadowing of great disaster and calamity. Slain bodies are predicted to be cast throughout the land of Israel; no place will be left unturned. The world will become chaos, and according to the text, within twelve months of the great Rabbi's death, it all became true. His death was mourned as the end of an era. In the previous story, death was interpreted as an inevitability; here, death is a sign to be read and understood.

One of the most touching stories in this collection is the story of Rabbi Hanina ben Tardion who was seized and sentenced to the stake for heresy. Zlotnick explains that his heresy consisted of teaching Torah to public gatherings, a capital offense at that time (Zlotnick, 140). The Rabbi was wrapped in a Torah scroll and set on fire; his daughter, overcome with grief, bewailed the end of both her father and the sacred scroll. Her father soothed her with the following words of wisdom:

> My daughter... if it is for me that you are weeping and for me that you throw yourself to the ground, it is better that a fire made by man should consume me, rather than a fire not made by man... But if it is for the Torah Scroll that you are weeping, lo, the Torah is fire, and fire cannot consume fire. Behold, the letters are flying into the air and only the parchment itself is burning (Sm. VIII:12).

With these beautiful and inspiring words, the story ends.

There are many more such stories in this chapter of the text, but these three may give the reader a general idea of their content. They are uplifting at times, and sobering at others. As a combination, they are more than an appropriate aspect of this text. In the midst of rules and dry formulations, we come across tales that may lead the reader through them with wisdom.

Chapter IX

Chapter IX begins with the subject of *keri'ah*, the rending of garments. The ritual of *keri'ah* has come up before, but it is only now, in this chapter, that it is developed.

The act of rending one's garment upon hearing about the death of a loved one can be traced back to the Bible. There are many examples of biblical characters committing *keri'ah*, the most famous being the passage in Genesis when Jacob is shown his son Joseph's bloodstained tunic: "He recognized it, and said, "My son's tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Joseph was torn by a beast!" Jacob rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins, and observed mourning for his son for many days" (Gen. 37:33-34). Reuben as well rent his clothes upon this realization. Further in the story, the brothers rent their clothes when the goblet was found in Benjamin's sack (Gen. 44:13), for the goblet represented imminent death. David and all the men surrounding him rent their clothes upon hearing

about the death of Saul (II Samuel 1:10), and Job, who knew grief so well, stood up and rent his clothes too (Job 1:20). These and other examples are the rabbinic justification for this important practice.

The grief expressed through the biblical rending of clothes has come to symbolize the tear in the soul caused by the death of a loved one. Rabbi Lamm explains it as being "an opportunity for psychological relief", an opportunity "to give vent to [the mourner's] pent-up anger and anguish by means of a controlled, religiously sanctioned act of destruction" (Lamm, 38). As one tears the garment, one is expressing the pain and destruction that has taken place in one's own heart; the act helps to satisfy the frustration of the moment. It has also been suggested by Lamm that the act of *keri'ah* may be serving as a substitute for the ancient pagan custom of tearing the flesh and the hair, which symbolized "the loss of one's own flesh and blood in sympathy for the deceased" (Lamm, 38-39). Either way, the act of *keri'ah* has become a central rite of passage and thus is given significant attention in the text. I will discuss only some of the intricate laws regarding this ritual act discussed in this chapter.

The first rule is that one is to rend one's garment only at the death of those family members who are close kin and "in the case of his teacher who had taught him wisdom" (Sm. IX:1). Zlotnick explains here that "the honor due to a teacher of wisdom is considered to be greater than that due to a father - for one brings a child to life in this world, whereas the other brings it to life in the world to come" (Zlotnick, 144). Therefore, a teacher is considered to be close kin and thus merits to be mourned that way. Moreover, the text rules that everyone ought to mourn, and thus rend their clothes, for a scholar or a

disciple, for here everyone is considered family. According to the text, when Rabbi Eliezer died, Rabbi Akiba "bared both arms and beat his breast, drawing blood" (Sm. IX:2).

For a father or a mother, the rending of clothes is more dramatic than for any other relative. The rent must bare the arms, whereas for other members of the family it need not (Sm. IX:3); the rent must be done by hand, whereas for other relatives it may be made by a knife (Sm. IX:4); the rent must cut through the neck of the garment, whereas for others it need not (Sm. IX:6). Finally, the mourner may baste the rent clothing after *sheloshim* in the case of a parent, but he may never mend it completely, whereas for other relatives, he may mend it after *shiv'ah* (Sm. IX:8). In other words, in the case of the death of a mother or a father, the rent must always be discernible. One may never cover up the external tear, for the internal one will likewise never mend. There will always remain a discernible scar.

An interesting, and perhaps quite wise rule is that the rent may not be superficial. The law commands that even if the mourner is wearing one hundred garments, "he must rend them all" (Sm. IX:7). The rent must bare the mourner's heart, and thus, if the mourner has not torn all his garments, he has not fulfilled this *mitzvah* (Goldberg, 93).

The text then examines the special considerations a mourner is to give in the case of the death of a parent. It is a well-known fact that the Jewish tradition places great honor upon the parent. One of the ten sacred commandments handed down from Sinai is considered to be the commandment to honor one's parents. It is therefore no surprise that special rules are proscribed for the death of a parent. Honoring a parent in death is considered to be even more praiseworthy than honoring them during their lifetime, for "he

who honors them in life may do so out of fear or out of hope for an inheritance, but he who honors them in death does so only for the sake of heaven" (Sm. IX:21/22).

It has already been noted that the rending of the garments is to be done differently in the case of a deceased parent. The funeral is also to be orchestrated differently. For "all other dead, [the mourner] should hasten the burial and not make the funeral elaborate. In the case of his father and mother, he should make an elaborate funeral and not hasten the burial, for whosoever takes pains with his father and mother is praiseworthy" (Sm. IX:9). Pressed clothes, which are permitted to the mourner after *sheloshim*, are forbidden to the mourner in the case of a deceased parent until "his friends get after him" (Sm. IX: 10). Similarly for his hair: a mourner mourning any relative other than one of his parents may cut his hair after *sheloshim*, but one mourning a parent may only do so when his friends begin chastising him (Sm. IX:11). He may also not join a funeral procession or engage in trade until his friends urge him to (Sm. IX: 13 & 14).

The text now returns to the subject of *keri'ah*. Earlier it was primarily concerned with for whom one is to rend one's garment. Now it examines the way in which one is to rend and later mend it. It also instructs those considering buying or selling a rent garment. For example, if one is buying a torn shirt, one may mend it only if "he knows that it is the kind of rent that may be mended" (Sm. IX: 20) Therefore, the law states that whosoever sells a torn shirt is responsible for informing the buyer "if it is the kind of rent that may not be mended" (Sm. IX:20). This law is a good example of the respect accorded to the grief of the mourner. If the rent is one which must always remain discernible, this must be the

case regardless of who is in possession of it. One may not sell one's symbol of grief away. The scar is to remain no matter who owns it.

Chapter X

Although the text has dealt with *shiv'ah* and even *sheloshim*, it now returns to the period of *aninut*, the period between the moment of death and interment. This is most poignant period of grief for the mourner, and thus it is at this time that the laws are the most restrictive. We have seen that the laws ease slowly as the mourner evolves from the period of *shiv'ah* to the period of *sheloshim*. Here we will see how the laws similarly ease from the period of *aninut* to *shiv'ah*. The first rule put forth is:

> So long as his dead lies unburied, a mourner is exempt from reciting *Shema*, from the *Tefillah*, from *tefillin* and from all the commandments written in the Torah. Should he wish to exact more of himself, he may not do so, because of the honor due to the dead (Sm. X:1).

The mourner, or more specifically here, the *onen*, is released from prayer, from *tefillin* and from the obligation to fulfill any of the positive commandments of the Torah. An *onen* is any immediate relative of the deceased from the moment he hears of the death until the end of interment. He only becomes a mourner after the grave has been filled and closure has taken place. Until then, he is not even a mourner; rather, he is a man in shock, disoriented and emotionally out of gear. As Rabbi Lamm explains, "the shock of death paralyses his consciousness and blocks out all regular patterns of orderly thinking...he is reliving the moment of death every instant during this period" (Lamm, 21).

The *onen* may only be concerned with his grief and the burial arrangements at this point. He is not only released from other obligations, but, according to the *Shulhan Arukh*,

if he desires to adopt for himself a stricter view and recite prayers for example, regardless of his state as an *onen*, he is actually forbidden to do so (Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 341:1). He is not released from the negative commandments at this time, for one is indeed never released from these, but he is released from prayer and the positive precepts. One reason for this may be, as Goldberg suggests, that, since one who is busy with a *mitzvah* is exempt from other *mitzvot*, and since it is a *mitzvah* to take care of the dead, so all other *mitzvot* are suspended until the end of *aninut* (Goldberg, 63). It may also be simple compassion that releases the *onen* from his obligations.

The *onen*, and indeed anybody else, is forbidden to eat in the presence of the deceased. He may eat in the home of a friend or at somebody else's house, or, if these options are not available, he must make a partition in his home between himself and the deceased. If even this is impossible, he must eat facing the wall. The *onen* is further forbidden to recline, overeat, drink wine or eat meat, and he is not to be included in any benediction (Sm. X:3).

At the end of the period of *aninut*, which is marked by the end of the interment of the deceased, mourning begins. We have already seen in some detail what this period of mourning implies. At this point in this chapter, the text reiterates some of the rites required at this time. For example, the text explains that as soon as the tomb is sealed, "the mourner must cover his head" (Sm. X:9). We came across this law in chapter six. In this chapter, the rule is repeated with additional details about when the mourner is to remove the headdress and when he is to wear it.

The laws about the Sabbath during *shiv'ah* are also reiterated here. These were discussed earlier in chapter seven. The text here gives more precise detail about exactly at what time the mourner must return the bed to its upright position (from having been inverted), put his shoes on and turn his rent clothes around (Sm. X:10), as well as at exactly what time he is to revert everything back.

In section twelve of this chapter, an interesting picture of the gradual process the mourner is to undergo during the first month of mourning is presented:

> On the first Sabbath, the mourner should not enter the synagogue.
> On the second, he may enter, but may not sit in his place.
> On the third, he may enter and sit in his place, but may not speak.
> On the fourth, he is like everyone else (Sm. X:12).

The period of *sheloshim* was discussed earlier in the text, but then suddenly, in this chapter, it is as though we are given a brief review. I believe there could be no better summary of the first month of mourning than that which is offered by this section. In these four short lines, the spirit, and perhaps even the purpose of *sheloshim* has been summarized: from *shiv'ah*, when he may not even enter the synagogue so upset has the mourner's life become, to the last week when the world has taken its upright position once again, the act and emotion of mourning, as it evolves, is here described beautifully.

The last few sections discuss how a scholastic community is to deal with the death of one of its members. We have seen in chapter nine that a scholar is to be mourned by the entire community. Here the text explains that when a scholar dies, "there should be a changing of seats in his academy" and when the leader of many academies dies, "his academies should be suspended; in all other courts and schools, there is a changing of seats" (Sm. X:13). Finally, when a *Nasi*, the head of the Great Rabbinic court, dies, "all

the academies must be suspended; not that people should remain idle, walking in the street, but rather they should sit in grief and in silence like men who have no leader" (Sm. X:14). These sections are giving more detailed instructions on how a community is to mourn its leader. In chapter nine in which this idea was first introduced in the text, a teacher was compared to a father, for just as the father brought the child into this world, so the teacher brings him into the world to come. The idea is here extended: just as a son is to mourn his father by changing seats in synagogue during *sheloshim*, so the community of students who are to mourn their mentor by changing seats throughout the entire academy.

Chapter XI

The first part of this chapter is a collection of instructions for unusual situations which may occur. The first situation addresses the question, If two deaths have occurred, which corpse is to be buried first. The answer provided is, not surprisingly, that the one who died first is to be buried first (Sm. XI:1). However, some distinctions are to be made. For instance, if one had been a man and the other a woman, regardless of who died first, the woman is to be interred before the man. This is because a woman "is always more easily put to shame" (Sm. XI:1) Zlotnick believes that the shame referred to here is one of "posthumous vaginal discharge" (Zlotnick, 154). Another distinction made is that of education: if a scholar and a disciple died, the scholar is buried first. However, if they were both scholars, the one who died first is to be buried first.

Although there are distinctions made here which affects who is to be buried first, one rule that applies to everyone is that the mourner's blessing may not be recited nor the mourner's row be formed until the second procession and funeral has taken place. Then the public may comfort all the mourners simultaneously (Sm. XI:3). Although one person may deserve a burial before the other, it would be disrespectful to delay the second burial longer than is necessary. Therefore, the second funeral begins before the first one ends, and then they may end together.

An alternative to this problem would be to carry out the two bodies simultaneously, on the same bier. This however, is only acceptable if the two people were of equal status and were equally acclaimed (Sm. XI:4). Similarly, two eulogies may not be delivered in the same town "unless there are enough people to pay tribute to both the one deceased and the other" (Sm. XI:5). With this law, everyone is guaranteed a proper burial and reception. No one is left behind; no one is forgotten, for everyone is important.

If a funerary procession meets a bridal procession, the text instructs that "the deceased must make way for the bride, the honor of the living coming before the honor of the dead" (Sm. XI:6). It also instructs that the study of Torah not be interrupted for the sake of a corpse or of a bride (Sm. XI:7). These laws are wonderful examples of the life-affirming nature of the Jewish tradition. One may even go so far as to say that the spirit of Judaism is expressed through these laws. The bridal procession moves ahead of the funerary procession simply because life moves ahead of death - it is the priority. Although respect for the deceased is very strong, the respect and even the acclamation for the living is stronger. The bridal procession is a perfect expression of life-affirmation. It must move

ahead of the funerary procession, for it carries with it all the hope and joy in the world. Death is part of the past, but the future moves forward. We may interpret the law forbidding Torah study to be interrupted for a corpse or a bride similarly. We have seen that Torah study is considered to be one of the greatest acts of joy. It is to be suspended only in times of mourning, during the periods of *aninut* and *shiv'ah* Otherwise, even in the case of a bride or a corpse (a corpse that one is not directly mourning). Torah study is not to be interrupted for joy is to come first. Since there is no greater joy for a Jew than studying the sacred words of God. and the tradition is life-affirming. nothing is to come between a man and these works. not even a corpse or a bride.

In the last few sections of this chapter. the text discusses particular details about the law of inverting the bed while in mourning. We have seen this rule many times in the text. but it is only here. in chapter eleven. that the law is discussed in detail. For example, it is explained that if a guest is staying in the home of a mourner. "he may invert the bed if he is on familiar terms with his host; otherwise. he should not invert the bed" (Sm. XI:13). It also explains exactly how one is to invert their bed and for how long it is to remain inverted (Sm. XI:15-19). These kinds of detailed rules help the mourner in his time of grief to determine what exactly he is to do and how.

Chapter XII

The first rule discussed in this chapter has to do with receiving delayed news of a death. According to the text. the day one hears about a death is like the day of burial itself, even if burial has passed. Therefore. the day one hears about a death one must rend one's

clothes and begin observing the precepts of *shiv'ah* and *sheloshim* (Sm. XII:1), no matter how much time has passed between the day of death and the day one hears of it. One must even rend one's clothes, even though the law states that one is to perform *keri'ah* only within the first seven days of mourning. The profound grief experienced in the first seven days after death are expressed through the act of *keri'ah*, but one may not mourn excessively, and so the law rules that after the first seven days, one is no longer permitted to rend one's clothes. However, when one did not previously know of the death, one may perform *keri'ah* and consequently follow the precepts of *shiv'ah* and *sheloshim* long after the death has occurred, for "the day of hearing the news is the height of [the mourner's] grief" (Goldberg, 285-6, footnote 3) and thus is like the day of burial itself.

In the same section, we come across the use of the ossilegium. The ossilegium is a practice no longer followed today, but at the time of the *Tractate Mourning*, it was evidently quite a popular practice. Zlotnick explains that it consisted of interring the dead in a temporary grave, "where the flesh disintegrated, and from which the bones were then gathered into small caskets, ossuaries or ostophagi, for final burial" (Zlotnick, 158). The text explains that both on the day of burial and on the day of the ossilegium, the flesh from the sacrifices may be eaten (Sm. XII:1). We therefore learn from this passage that the practice of ossilegium could be equated to a certain extent with the day of burial. We see this also in section 3, which states that when clothes are rent at the time of death, they must also be rent at the time of ossilegium. Furthermore, "whenever clothes rent in the event of death may not be mended, they may not be mended in the event of ossilegium" (Sm. XII:3). We have seen that in the case of certain deaths, a mourner may not mend his

rent clothes, but may only baste them (Sm. IX:19). In these cases, the mourner is to rend his clothes during the ossilegium as well, and is not to mend them either.

An important difference between the day of burial and the day of ossilegium is that, after burial has taken place, mourning is to be observed for seven, and eventually for thirty days. After the ossilegium however, one is to mourn only one day (Sm. XII:4). Months have passed, the body has had time to decompose, and the mourner has had time to grieve. The grief at the time of ossilegium is consequently not as poignant, and so the need to mourn is not as strong.

The text now goes into some detail about how exactly the practice of transferring a body into an ossilegium is to be performed and by whom. For example, the bones of a corpse should not be taken apart nor the tendons severed, unless they had fallen by themselves or had been severed by themselves (Sm. XII:6). It also instructs that a mourner not collect the bones of their own father or mother; they may collect the bones of other dead, but not of their own parents. It would perhaps be too traumatic for someone to handle the bones of their own parents.

The text concludes this chapter with a collection of odds and ends. For example, the text states that, out of a sense of propriety, a man may shroud and gird the corpse of a man, but he may not do so for a woman. A woman on the other hand, may shroud and gird the corpse of a man or a woman. Similarly, a man may attend another man suffering from intestinal illness, but he may not attend a woman in this condition. A woman may attend both a man and a woman suffering in this way (Sm. XII:10). Zlotnick explains this

as being a result of the fact that "a man is more likely to indulge in unchaste fancies" (Zlotnick, 162).

Thereafter, we have rules about whether or not one is permitted to remove the fringes from the shroud of the deceased before interment (Sm. XII:11), about with whom one may enter the bathhouse (Sm. XII:12) and finally about whether or not a corpse may be carried out on a bier if the greater part of the body is not intact (Sm. XII:13).

Chapter XIII

Chapter thirteen deals primarily with instructions of ossilegium and cemetery etiquette. The first law instructs the person collecting the bones for final burial that he is exempt from reciting the daily prayers, donning the *tefillin* and from all the commandments in the Torah (Sm. XIII:1). There is some controversy regarding this law, for the text seems to imply that different rabbis were of different opinions about this. The *Shulhan Arukh* however, seems quite certain: one who is collecting bones is exempt from prayer and positive precept (Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 403:9). We have seen in the previous chapter that the day of ossilegium and the day of burial are similar to a certain extent, for the death is being relived and thus some mourning rites apply at this later time. One of these is the restriction against reciting prayers or donning the phylacteries, again perhaps because one is released from other *mitzvot* whilst performing this one.

Another law regarding the ossilegium is that the bones may not be carried from place to place loose in a wagon or on the back of an animal, nor may one sit on them. They may only be carried in a case. The same applies to any sacred scroll (Sm. XIII:2).

The *Shulhan Arukh* explains that to carry the bones in any other way is simply "a disrespectful way of treating them" (Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 403:10). The only time during which one may sit on them is if there is a threat of robbers or rovers, for it is certainly better to disrespect the bones of the dead for a short time in order to secure them and the transporter than to stubbornly adhere to a law that endangers everyone. We see in this law yet again the life-affirming spirit of Judaism: few laws are to be followed in the face of life-threatening adversity, for according to the legal system itself, life is more important than law.

The next law discussed is a good example of the respect Judaism holds for its dead. It states that while passing through a cemetery, "one should not wear *tefillin* or hold a Sacred Scroll in his arm, this being mockery of the dead" (Sm. XIII:3). Zlotnick explains that the mockery lies in the fact that the dead are unable to follow these precepts of prayer and *tefillin* (Zlotnick, 164), and so to follow them in the dead's presence is to flaunt this capacity in the face of their lack. As Proverbs 17:5 says, "He who rejoices over another's misfortune will not go unpunished", and indeed, is not prayer rejoicement and the incapacity to pray a misfortune? This idea is taken even further in the next section which explains that if while hollowing a burial shaft in a tomb, the time for the recitation of daily prayers approaches, one must leave the area in order to pray and then come back, but one must not pray in the tomb (Sm. XIII:4).

Neither a corpse nor bones may be moved from the place in which one finds them (Sm. XIII:5-7). The only exception would be in order to move the corpse or bones to the family tomb, even if this means moving them from an honored place to a wretched place.

It is permitted, "for by this he is honored" (Sm. XIII:7). Moreover, two corpses may not be buried beside one another, nor bones with a corpse, for this is a disgrace to the dead (Zlotnick, 164). Every corpse or collection of bones is to be respected as an individual entity, and thus may neither be moved nor put beside another, but rather must have its own allotted place, just as they did in life.

Finally, a tomb may be cleared out, but it may not be turned into a barn or a stall for cattle, or into a woodshed or a warehouse (Sm. XIII:9). This is again an example of the respect Judaism holds for the dead. Although a tomb may be cleared out, it may not be used for such purposes that would disrespect those that once laid there. Utilitarianism simply does not apply to the Jewish attitude towards their dead.

Chapter XIV

The code of conduct required in cemeteries continues in this, the final chapter. First of all, "no water may be channeled through a cemetery; nor may a path be made, nor may cattle be grazed, nor may one take walks there, nor may wood and grass be gathered there" (Sm. XIV:1). Just as an individual tomb may not be turned into a barn, so a cemetery may not be turned into a grazing patch for cattle. Basically, it is forbidden to treat the cemetery lightly (Goldberg, 196). A cemetery must be respected and honored as the resting place of the dead, and thus may not be benefited from in any way nor used as anything other than as a burial ground.

The text then instructs, as it had in the previous chapter, that a tomb may not be moved from place to place nor transferred from family to family. A funeral urn however,

may be moved and transferred (Sm. XIV:2). This is again in reference to the respect that the dead deserve. Furthermore, "a new tomb may be measured, sold or divided. An old tomb may be neither measured, nor sold, nor divided" (Sm. XIV:3). Denburg explains, in his notes to the *Shulhan Arukh*, that a new grave is one which was designated as a grave, but in which no corpse was buried as yet, and that "since 'designation alone is not considered a material act' consequently, measuring, selling and dividing the grave is permissible" (Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 368:3, footnote 19). The important point here I believe, is that although respect must be accorded to the dead, this code of conduct does have boundaries. One must not treat a burial ground lightly, nor move corpses around, but at the same time, one must not become obsessive about death either. If a tomb has not been used yet, but has only been designated as one, then it does not yet carry the sanctity or the impurity of a tomb and so may be divided or sold like any other piece of material. A tomb is only sanctified once a corpse has lain within it.

The next few sections deal with the question of who may be buried alongside of whom, specifically, whom a woman is to be buried with. If both her husband and her father want her to be buried beside them in their death, or conversely, if neither the husband nor the father want her beside them, and if she has had children with her husband, then the law stipulates that she is to be buried alongside her husband, because "he is responsible for her maintenance, her ransom and her burial" (Sm. XIV:7). We also find a series of laws regarding which tombs may be cleared out and which may not (Sm. XIV:8-11).

From section 12 to section 15, the text reverts to a discussion about how one is greet a mourner and conduct oneself in a mourner's house. We have seen in chapter six that special instructions are allotted to the mourner about how he is to greet others. In this chapter, the text discusses how others are responsible for greeting him. The rabbis are cited here as being in disagreement, but basically the idea is that within the first thirty days, whosoever sees a mourner should comfort him but not ask how he is feeling, and after the thirty days and within the twelve months, one should ask how he is feeling and then comfort him. According to Rabbi Meir, one in no way is to remind him of his suffering after the twelve months have passed (Sm. XIV:12), for it is like tearing open someone's wound in order to heal them. If the wound has closed and healed, even though there is a scar, there is no reason to tear it open once more. It is believed in Judaism that the year marks the end of mourning. At this point, one is to leave the scar alone.

The text permits others to bring cakes, meat, fish and under certain circumstances, lentils to the mourner's house (Sm. XIV:13). Zlotnick explains that, "just as the lentil has no mouth, so a mourner must remain silent, not questioning his fate. Or, just as the lentil is round, so mourning travels like a wheel, coming upon the inhabitants of the world" (Zlotnick, 168). Today, the mourner most often eats an egg, itself also round and representing the continuity and roundness of life.

The text also instructs ten cups of wine to be drunk in the mourner's house. Two cups of wine are to be drunk before the meal, five during the meal and three after the meal: "one for the mourner's blessing, one for comforting the mourners, and one for acts of kindness" (Sm. XIV:14). It was believed that drinking some wine during a meal did not

lead to intoxication, but rather served to dissolve the food in the bowels (Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 378:8). According to Zlotnick, wine was believed to also be a sharpener of the appetite (Zlotnick, 168). Drinking wine in order to whet the appetite and loosen the stomach for digestion during mourning is certainly wise, for during mourning one may be so overcome with grief as to not acknowledge the body's hunger, or else one's tension might be so tight as to interrupt digestion and cause upset. By issuing wine during the meal, these problems are overcome. Moreover, alcohol in moderation may serve to calm the mourner in this time of grief.

The last law about mourning discussed in this text is one which discusses the recitation of Grace in the mourner's house. However, the text does not end on that note. Rather, the text ends with the following:

> Whosoever sees a place where miracles were wrought for Israel must say: "Blessed be the Lord who wrought miracles for our fathers in this place" (Sm. XIV:16).

According to Zlotnick, the reason for this final section is so that the text may close on a cheerful note (Zlotnick, 169). Although the entire text has been primarily centered on the issue of death, it nonetheless ends with a law that focuses on the wonder of the universe, on the glory of the God of the People of Israel. Although the *Kaddish* has not been discussed in this text directly, one may say that this closing line is in the spirit of the *Kaddish*. The *Kaddish* has become over time the most important prayer sung by the mourner during *shiv'ah* and thereafter. It rings out of every mourner's home twice, and sometimes three times a day, and yet this mourner's prayer speaks neither of death nor of mourning. Rather, it speaks about the greatness of God. The *Kaddish* is one of the most

awe-inspiring prayers in Judaism, as well as one of the most familiar. It is a praise to God in all His majesty and glory, and it is today sung by the mourner in his moment of greatest despair. This text, the *Tractate Mourning*, centers on the issue of death, and yet ends with a note about miracles. It ends, in a sense, with its own kind of *Kaddish*. Perhaps it is the Jewish way of saying that amidst pain and suffering, there is always more joy to look forward to, a joy which may always be inspired by the greatness of God.

CHAPTER III

Compassion

Compassion is a quality admired around the world. No religion could possibly teach without it, but some religions are more expressive about it than others. Tibetan Buddhism, particularly since the advent of the fourteenth Dalai Lama, has made compassion its focal point. It has become the most important quality sought for in a human being. To be truly compassionate is to be closer to buddhahood. Compassion in Judaism is also admired and discussed at length in many texts, but it is in no way as strongly expressed as it is in Buddhism. In this chapter, I will begin with a brief presentation of Tibetan Buddhist compassion, discuss this compassion as it comes forth in the *Bar do thos grol*, and then explore how such a compassion, although perhaps less obvious, exists in Judaism, and more particularly in the *Tractate Mourning*.

Compassion is the trademark of Tibetan Buddhism. It is the primary quality that will lead a Buddhist to enlightenment, and indeed is the manifestation of enlightenment itself. Without the quality of compassion, Buddhism would be meaningless and empty. The Dalai Lama defines compassion as being "based on a clear acceptance of recognition that others, like oneself, want happiness and have the right to overcome suffering. On that basis one develops some kind of concern about the welfare of others, irrespective of one's attitude to oneself. That is compassion" (Dalai Lama, 1995, pp. 62-63). Compassion is a concern for others, and a concern for others is generated out of the belief that others are just like oneself. To understand that all beings feel pleasure and pain, that all beings want happiness, just like oneself, is to have a compassionate heart. In the words of Shantideva:

> Hence I should dispel the misery of others
> Because it is suffering just like my own,
> And I should benefit others
> Because they are sentient beings just like myself (Williams, 201).

The *bodhicitta*, the Mind of Enlightenment or the Awakening Mind, is the mind developed from deep compassion for the suffering of others. This is the mind of the Buddha. Williams quotes the Dalai Lama as saying that, in Mahayana, there are no absolutes, but if there were one, it would be compassion (Williams, 198), for compassion is the essence of the Buddha mind. Without it, there would never have been a Buddha. Prince Sakyamuni would never have been moved by the image of the old man, the sick and the dead had his heart not been filled with compassion. He consequently would never have sought enlightenment or brought the dharma to this age. Neither Sakyamuni Buddha, the dharma nor any present-day Buddhist teacher would have come to be without the power of compassion. Shantideva praises compassion and the *bodhicitta* in the following way:

> It is like the supreme gold-making elixir,
> For it transforms the unclean body we have taken
> Into the priceless jewel of a Buddha Form.
> Therefore firmly seize this Awakening Mind.
>
> How can I fathom the depths
> Of the goodness of this jewel of the mind,
> The panacea that relieves the world of pain
> And is the source of all its joy? (Williams, 198)

It is the force of compassion that leads the bodhisattvas of the world to choose rebirth over and over again, for it is out of compassion for the suffering of all sentient beings that a bodhisattva will vow to return until all beings are free. The bodhisattva vow is central to Mahayana Buddhism, and the vow itself is centered around compassion. Shantideva expressed the bodhisattva vow most poignantly: "So long as sentient beings remain, so

long as space remains, I will remain in order to serve, or in order to make some small contribution for the benefit of others" (Dalai Lama, 1995, p.82). To truly feel deep compassion for others, to truly generate this *bodhicitta*, is believed to be a life-transforming experience that simply cannot be underestimated.

In the *Bar do thos grol*, the issue of compassion is a recurrent theme, both directly as well as indirectly. There are two facets of this compassion which I would like to discuss: the compassion displayed towards the deceased and the compassion displayed towards the mourners.

The compassion displayed towards the deceased is the most obvious expression of compassion in the text. The very act of having someone read the text to the deceased as he or she travels through the *bardos* is an act of compassion. The journey along the *bardos*, as we have seen, can be a very tumultuous and disturbing voyage. All kinds of frightening and even horrific images overwhelm the mind in this state. It could be a time of terror and isolation. However, it may also be a time of enlightenment, of profound insight and understanding into the nature of reality and the nature of one's own mind. It may be a moment of terrific opportunity just as it may be a moment of despair. The very fact of the existence of this text as a guide is a fact of compassion. A guide, be it Virgil for Dante or the *Bar do thos grol* for the Tibetan pilgrim, is a warm embrace of compassion. To guide is to concern oneself with the welfare of another, and this is nothing less than the definition of compassion.

Moreover, the manner in which the text guides is very precise in both detail and structure. This use of detail and structure can be said to be drawn from a source of

compassion. The text describes the *bardos* with a very strong sense of accuracy; very little is left to the hearer's imagination. It is as though the guide is taking one's hand and indicating, step by step and moment by moment, where to go. It is, in effect, being an excellent guide. The hearer is in good hands with the text. Although it may seem presumptuous to the modern western mind for a text to go into such detail about states which may not exist, it may also be seen as a truly compassionate act, for the detail may in fact serve to soothe the hearer in his or her journey. It may relax them through this journey, for no event remains unexplained, and all events are predicted. Were the text anything less than compassionate, such detail and precision would not be included. The audience would be left on its own, fending for itself.

Aside from being compassionate from the simple fact of its being a detailed and structured guide, the *Bar do thos grol* is moreover compassionate in the way in which it chooses to guide the journeyman. The most striking feature of the text in my view is the unceasing hope it offers the audience as it listens.

Repeatedly throughout the text, the opportunity for enlightenment is presented to the hearer. Regardless of how many times this opportunity is missed, the wonderful thing is that there is always another opportunity in the process of flowering. In other words, opportunities never come to an end. The amount of tolerance and compassion the text presents for its audience is astounding. No being, no matter how blind or ignorant, is beyond the scope of the *Bar do thos grol*. Every being always has the opportunity for enlightenment. This view expresses an immense amount of compassion for human frailty and error. It would perhaps be wonderful if all beings could seize opportunities as they

come; but life generally does not function that way. A person may walk past an opportunity a hundred times before recognizing it, and the text, accepting human nature as such, offers a hundred opportunities because of it.

This may all be linked or interconnected with the important Mahayana Buddhist notion of *tathagata-garbha*. The *tathagata-garbha* is the Buddha-nature that all sentient beings carry within them. It is the seed of potential for enlightenment, the seed that lies within that will eventually one day grow into a Buddha. It may also be seen as the part of a being that is a Buddha already, and thus needs only to be recognized in order for the person to become enlightened. Either way, it is agreed that the Buddha-nature is the nature that each and every living being carries within them, the nature that is linked with enlightenment. The *Tathagatagarbha sutra* says that

> all living beings, though they are among the defilements of hatred, anger and ignorance, have the Buddha's wisdom, Buddha's Eye, Buddha's Body sitting firmly in the form of meditation. -Thus, in spite of their being covered with defilements, transmigrating from one path... to another, they are possessed of the Matrix of the Tathagata, endowed with virtues, always pure, and hence are not different from me. -Having thus observed, the Buddha preached the doctrine in order to remove the defilements and manifest the Buddha-nature (within the living beings) (Williams, 97).

This belief that all living beings have within them the Buddha Body, that, despite the fact that they live among the defilements of hatred, anger and ignorance, are nonetheless endowed with virtues and are always pure, is a belief rooted in compassion and hope. It is a belief that does not permit one to turn one's back on any living creature, no matter how corrupt they may have become. It is a belief that always offers the opportunity for liberation. The *Bar do thos grol* follows the path of the *tathagata-garbha* in just this way: it closes the door on no one, at any time, for all essentially carry the Buddha within.

An example of this continual "open-door-policy" would be the moment of the Clear Light of Death. As we have seen, the moment of the Clear Light of Death which takes place in the *Bardo* of Dying is the most powerful moment experienced during the *bardos*, the most intense moment of clarity and therefore the most accessible window to enlightenment. All too often however, the moment of the Clear Light of Death, despite the wonders it offers, frightens or overwhelms the subject, thereby causing them to reject it. The opportunity afforded by the Clear Light of Death thereupon vanishes. The compassion lies in the fact that, although the greatest of opportunities has not been recognized, the door to other opportunities remains open. The door never closes completely on any being. The moment of the Clear Light may be the most accessible moment for enlightenment due to its intensity and clarity, but it is not the only moment that affords this opportunity. Enlightenment is forever at one's disposal, for the potential for enlightenment is not limited. There is no point of no return in the Tibetan view: enlightenment is eternally accessible. This is the view of the *Bar do thos grol*, and it is nothing short of compassionate. Although some schools may argue that *tathagata-garbha* is not universally present in every sentient being, that there are exceptions to this rule such as the *Icchantikas* who are beings so corrupt that they have lost their access to the seed of their own Buddha nature, the text clearly rests on a premise of universality. The text speaks to all beings as Buddhas waiting to emerge.

The *Bar do thos grol* is therefore compassionate both in the fact of its being a guide to the pilgrim, and in the philosophy with which it guides. I would like to argue here that it further displays compassion towards the mourners, although this only indirectly.

We have seen that the Jewish text, the *Tractate Mourning*, focuses entirely on the living left behind. It focuses on how, when and with whom they are to mourn. In the *Bar do thos grol* however, virtually no direction is given at all to the mourners. The text is entirely centered around the deceased. The text is read aloud by a lama or close friend (dharma-brother) in the deceased's presence and is meant to guide the deceased along his or her journey. The mourners, however - the loved ones, the family and the friends - seem to be completely overlooked by this text. How are they to grieve? For how long? Who is to direct them in this time of despair? Is it not the role of religion to guide its people in such times? Although the *Bar do thos grol* is indeed nothing more than one text in a vast sea of many, and thus direction may be offered to the mourners elsewhere in other texts, the *Bar do thos grol* is nonetheless considered today to be the principal text used and referred to at the time of someone's death. Where then, in this particular text, is the mourner's direction?

Although the text is virtually silent regarding the mourners left behind, and thus seems to offer them no direction, it is my contention that the text actually does, though indirectly. The only direction given to the mourners during the entire reading is given once at the beginning of the text, when it instructs the reader to shut out any crying or weeping relatives from the death chamber, for these sounds of grief are considered to be "not good" for the consciousness of the deceased (Fremantle, 34), and once near the end, when it says that "in the presence of the corpse, friends and relations should not weep and mourn and make a noise, which may be done elsewhere" (Fremantle, 93). Other than this, the mourners are given no instructions, and so one might conclude that they are neglected

in their time of grief. However, it is my argument that these sparse directions in effect direct the mourners more than it may seem.

We learn two things from the instructions that mourners are not to grieve in the presence of the corpse, but are permitted to grieve outside: 1) grieving is permitted but is to be controlled and 2) mourners are to be present during the reading of the text. These are two very significant factors that need to be taken into consideration if one is to understand the mourners' role during this time.

First of all, grieving is permitted expression, but it is kept under control. The mourners in the Tibetan tradition need to grieve and cry as do mourners in the rest of the world. They are no different. However, this grief is to be curbed. They may not grieve in the presence of the corpse, for this is believed to disturb the journey of the deceased through the *bardos*. They may only wail outside. This direction given to the mourners has, in my view, an incredible impact on the psychology of mourning. Grieving may not get out of hand; it cannot be limitless in either time or place. It has a boundary, and this boundary may serve to keep the internal grief within bounds as well. We have seen how the Jewish tradition creates boundaries for the grief of the mourner by subscribing times to grieve and the behavior appropriate to them. Although the Tibetan care for its mourners in this text is not nearly as sophisticated or as detailed, I believe that this instruction to limit when and where the mourners may grieve serves the same purpose. Indeed, this one direction, which appears only twice in the *Bar do thos grol*, is in my view the Tibetan equivalent of the *aninut*, *shiv'ah* and *sheloshim* periods of the Jewish tradition.

The second thing we learn from these minor directions given to the mourners in the *Bar do thos grol* is that the mourners are present during the reading of the text, other than when they are grieving. The text is traditionally read for forty-nine days after death has occurred. If the family and friends are to be present during the reading, they are consequently to assist for a total of forty-nine days. This is an enormous commitment. The text does not regulate who is responsible for this presence during the reading and who is not, nor does it regulate at exactly what time of day it is to take place or how the mourners are to conduct themselves during the reading and thereafter, nor even if the entire text is to be read forty-nine times, or whether just a fragment is to be read daily for forty-nine days. All it specifies (and this specification is done indirectly) is that the mourners may be present during the reading.

We have seen that the reading of the *Bar do thos grol* consists of a description of the difficult and at times, chaotic events that the psyche goes through after death. The text takes the subject through this journey, step by step and moment by moment. However, perhaps the subject of this reading is not only the deceased. Perhaps there is more than one subject involved: perhaps, the reading is meant for the mourners as well.

Tibetan Buddhist death rites are clearly meant to center around the being who has recently died. It is meant for the deceased and is about the deceased. When there is prayer to be done, it is prayer directed to the deceased. The rites are in no way directly concerned with the living left behind. However, by assisting the reading of this text, it is my belief that the mourners go through their own *bardos*, and that perhaps the *bardos* described as being experienced in the after-death state by the deceased are as well experienced in the

living *bardo* by the mourners in their own way. Although this kind of conjecture cannot be verified, I suggest that the text does indeed serve this function. Primarily, the text cares for the deceased, but it cares for the mourners too. By having them assist this profound reading, it allows them to undergo a process of their own, and forty-nine days later, to emerge somehow changed. Why would the mourners otherwise be present? What would be the purpose of having them there when they may interrupt or disturb the process with laments, talking or just sneezing? The text instructs the reader to read the text by putting "the lips close to the ear [of the body] without actually touching it" (Evans-Wentz, 87), for according to Tibetan belief, a dead body must not be touched in order that the *bardo* process not be interfered with. If the process is so sensitive that the ear may not even be touched during the reading of the text, why would the text risk interference by offering the mourners a place during the reading? Why else but because the process of the reading is meant for them too. Although the text seems to be entirely concerned with the consciousness of the deceased, it would simply not be in keeping with Tibetan Buddhist philosophy to leave the rest of those concerned, in a time of such intense suffering, completely unaided. Tibetan Buddhism is, in general, very concerned with the alievement of suffering of the world. Buddhism at its most basic level is primarily centered around the recognition of suffering and the means to liberating the world from it. It would be inconsistent for such an important Tibetan text not to ease the mourners out of their distress. I therefore conclude that, in this indirect manner, the text does in fact supervise the mourners through their pain. They are neither neglected nor overlooked. Furthermore, I believe that in having them keep their grief under control in the presence of the corpse

for the sake of the deceased, the text may be offering the mourners the opportunity to care for someone else despite their distress. It forces them to see beyond their own pain, to remember that the needs of others come first. We can thus see that no opportunity is missed to emphasize the importance of compassion; even in life's most dramatically painful moment, the tradition urges one towards compassion. It would be so easy to wallow in isolation, but the tradition forces its mourners to participate and take part in life and in the care for another instead. The tradition is urging its mourners to make use of their own potential for compassion, and consequently, through this compassion, to heal themselves.

Judaism does not share the same philosophical emphasis on compassion. Compassion is discussed and profoundly valued throughout the literature, but it is rarely expressed as a pivotal concept as it is in Tibetan Buddhism. One may argue rather that the Jewish tradition pivots around law. Although there are many founding premises upholding this vast and ancient tradition, law is certainly one of the most prominent. As one leafs through the early rabbinic texts, one will quickly find oneself overwhelmed in a sea of legalistic discussions and debates. The concern is primarily one of *how* one is to live a good life, *how* one is to be a good Jew, the code of conduct which would lead one to become a good human being. The *Tractate Mourning* is one of these early legal documents. It is focused entirely on the rules and regulations the community is to follow in the case of a death. Any philosophical issues, such as the after-death state or the meaning of death, are completely absent from the text. Unlike the *Bar do thos grol*, the abstract

afterlife is of no concern here. Certainly other Jewish texts are concerned with such issues, but this text, one of the founding texts in this area, is not. This text consists only of a code of conduct, a "death-etiquette."

The question I would like to address here is, Does such a rule-based attitude imply a lack of philosophical insight? It will be the argument of this section that this abundance of regulation actually reflects an enormous amount of philosophical insight, and more particularly, of compassion. Through this long list of rules, Judaism is not necessarily attempting to stifle and to control, but to care and to support through wisdom and compassion. This abundance of rules is a means by which the tradition expresses its emotion.

The *Tractate Mourning*, as we have seen, is a text centered on the issue of death. Unlike the *Bar do thos grol* however, it is not concerned with the after-death state or the deceased's welfare. Rather, it is entirely concerned with the living left behind, directing them along a path that is meant to help them deal with their loss. The most obvious element of compassion in this text is therefore the compassion it displays towards the mourners.

The mourners are directed in their grief from the moment their loved one has died until the end of *sheloshim*. Not one day during this time is without instruction on how to behave, whom to greet and what to eat. It is astounding how detailed this instruction is. It is as though the text's intention is to predict any and all situations that may arise during this time and to answer each one, so that the mourner need not decide for himself in this

desperate time. Indeed, before all else, I would argue that this enormous attention to detail is the first and most important expression of compassion to the mourners.

For example, we may look at how the text deals with festivals during mourning. In section VII:2, it states:

> If one has a death in the family a day before the festival, he should suspend mourning during the entire festival and count six days after the festival. If two days before the festival, he should suspend mourning during the entire festival and count five days after the festival. If three days before the festival, he need no longer invert the bed.

Such precise explanation leaves little room for improvisation or conjecture. The text makes clear to the reader what the mourner must do in as many cases as possible. Another example may be the text's approach to *keri'ah*, the rending of garments. In chapter nine, the text examines how, in which manner and for whom one is to perform the act of *keri'ah*. The text explains the different ways one is to rend one's garment if one is mourning for one's parent as opposed to mourning for another relative. It also describes the procedure for a scholastic community that loses its teacher. It gives instructions on how long the rend is to be, and how deep. It even instructs the mourners on how to mend the garment once the mourning period has come to a close. These laws on mending the torn garments are a wonderful example of the care the text expresses to its people. Let us imagine what it would be like to perform *keri'ah*, and then be left in the dark about how to deal with the garment thereafter. That torn garment is meant to represent the grief, the tear one feels in one's heart as a result of a loved one's death. It therefore represents a very difficult and trying time. When that time comes to an end, what is one to do with that representative piece? Is the person expected to just throw it away, or is he to mend it so

that it looks as it did before, hiding the stage in between? If the text did not direct its readers in this, would it not leave them somewhat uncared for? By going into such detail, even in the after-state, the text is expressing ongoing support and care for its mourners. It leaves no stone unturned, no question unanswered.

In a system not so focused on law, a lack of precision would not necessarily express a lack of care. However, for a tradition whose very foundation rests to such a large degree on law, precision is essential and an expression of compassion. The Jewish people *expect* law, look for law as the answer to their questions. It is for this reason that any gaps in the law would lead to confusion or perhaps a feeling of abandonment. By providing legal answers to as many situations as possibly foreseeable, the tradition is expressing, a great deal of compassion towards its people. It is caring for them as they need to be cared for. The Tibetan tradition does not revolve around law, and therefore the Tibetan people do not seek it so much in order to resolve their questions. They do not seek precision in law, but they do seek precision in "celestial affairs." Were the tradition not to provide such precision, the Tibetans may come to feel abandoned and alone as well. In both traditions therefore, precision and detail comfort the followers, give them solace and a sense of security. The only difference lies in where this precision is to be found.

Precision is not the only means used by the text in order to demonstrate compassion toward its mourners. The content of the laws itself is compassionate. Each and every law discussed in the *Tractate Mourning* is clearly derived from insight into the psychology of mourning. For example, let us consider the progression the text requires of the mourner, from the stage of *aninut* to *shiv'ah* and finally to *sheloshim*.

During *aninut*, the *onen* is released from the obligation to fulfill any positive precepts of the Torah, of reciting prayer and donning *tefillin*. He is further forbidden to overeat, drink wine, eat meat or be included in any benediction. He is restricted from indulging himself in any way and may not even follow any of the *mitzvot* dictated by Scripture, for the *onen* is a man that must entirely concern himself with burial arrangements and his own grief. To ask or require anything more of him would indeed be uncompassionate. If the *onen* would like to do more during this time, the law actually forbids him to do so. He may not escape either his responsibilities or his pain. He must deal with both, and consequently, given that both of these are so intense at this time, he is forbidden to do anything else. The period of *aninut* requests of the subject that he deal with the issues at hand immediately. Should such legal restriction not be present, the *onen* might procrastinate and consequently find himself dealing with the death of his loved ones years after the event. *Aninut* secures the followers of the Jewish tradition from such psychological dangers.

Once burial has taken place, the period of *shiv'ah* begins. As we have seen, the beginning of *shiv'ah* marks the transition from being an *onen* to becoming a mourner. The grave has been sealed, there has been closure, and thus the period requesting acceptance of this death begins. This is *shiv'ah*. During this time, the mourner is forbidden to work, to cut his hair or wash himself, to wear shoes, leave the house and more. His life has become very restrictive. All activities that are not completely necessary are forbidden. He remains at home in order to meditate on his grief and the community comes to him. As a result of these laws, he is never alone during his most poignant moments. Rather, he is surrounded

by the community to which he belongs; he is cared for and supported. Moreover, since this time leads to a reflection of the most basic of realities about life, his *vie quotidienne* is reduced to the most basic of necessities. In this way, his inner and outer worlds reflect each other. Instead of burying his mother and the same day returning to work - a place which could hardly reflect anything he is experiencing at that time - the law orders that he create for himself a time and place that resembles all that he is feeling. He is seated on a low stool for seven days and remains unwashed. This offers him a chance to truly experience his state. At the same time however, he is never alone, and his community is even instructed on how to approach him. Greetings are changed to suit his needs, and his status as a mourner is never taken away. He remains in mourning in the community's eyes until the time allotted has passed.

When the first seven days have come to an end, the most difficult time is considered to have passed. However, the mourner does not suddenly return to his former life. He is eased out of it slowly. The tradition does not request that mourning altogether come to an end: the end of the *shiv'ah* period rather marks the end of one of the stages of mourning. For a period of thirty days after burial, thus for approximately twenty-three days after the close of *shiv'ah*, the mourner continues to be restricted. However, just as the mourner is eased out of *aninut* and into *shiv'ah*, so he is eased out of *shiv'ah* and into *sheloshim*. He is still barred from cutting his hair and washing his clothes, but he is no longer restricted from wearing shoes or leaving his home. He may eat and drink freely, but he is to curb his appetite for celebration. Therefore, he is not to arrange wedding feasts or celebrate a betrothal during this time. Most importantly, he is to mourn. He must never

forget at any point during these thirty days that he is still a mourner. *Sheloshim* is a period of mourning to be observed, but it is in no way as strict or as harsh as the periods of *aninut* or *shiv'ah*. As time passes, the laws lessen their hold on the mourner. We can therefore see a direct correlation between restriction and grief: the greater the grief, the greater the restriction, as though the restriction were implemented in order to steer the mourner in his most vulnerable time. It is in one's moment of most profound pain that one is the most susceptible to despair and escape. It is therefore at this time that the laws hold and direct their mourners the most. As time passes and the wounds begin to heal, the laws slowly let go.

This progression of mourning rites emanates from a profound insight into the stages of mourning, and they are put forth in compassion for those who undergo these. Even if compassion is never directly discussed, and perhaps never even consciously considered as a motivation, it is nonetheless clear that compassion is one of the directing forces behind the establishment of these laws. There are many more examples of this expressed throughout the text. For instance, the attitude the text holds towards its very own rules is a wonderful expression of such compassion. It would be easy for such a rule-based religion to become stubborn about adherence to rules, and yet regularly the text explains that in cases of emergency of any kind, adherence is not necessary. For instance, a mourner is expected to invert his bed and couch. However, the text explains that this is not required in places in which this action gives rise to anti-Semitism. Similarly for walking barefoot while in mourning. The text also permits a breaking of rules when finances are endangered. For instance, even though work is forbidden during *shiv'ah*, a

mourner may nonetheless finish pressing his olives, if there is a chance that they will spoil if left unattended. A baker is permitted to continue working, if the community has no other baker. From these we can see that the laws are meant to direct its mourners, but they are not meant to stifle them. When adherence to law causes more pain than healing, adherence is no longer required.

Unlike the *Bar do thos grol*, the *Tractate Mourning* is not concerned with the dead themselves. It is entirely focused on the living left behind, guiding them through their journey of grief. It is therefore a manual for the living whereas the *Bar do thos grol* is considered to be a manual for the dead. I have shown above that the *Bar do thos grol* indirectly cares for the living, and I would like to now show that the *Tractate Mourning*, although it does not care for the dead, it does express concern for the dying.

Although we cannot argue that the *Tractate Mourning* is at all concerned with the state of the soul once life has departed as is the *Bar do thos grol*, we can argue that the *Tractate Mourning*, in its own way, cares very much for the dying and is concerned with easing the journey towards death as much as possible. It is therefore not only a manual for the mourners in their grief, but a manual for soon-to-be mourners as well. It is always a manual to guide the living and never really a manual for the dead, or even for those approaching death. But the manual extends its direction not only to those who deal with loss, but also to those who are about to. And as the living are directed to respect and care for those whose life is ebbing way, they provide comfort and peace for them.

The directions given to the community about the manner in which they are to treat the dying are few. They appear at the very beginning of the text: the family is not to close

the dying person's eyes or bind his jaw, stop his orifices or wash his body. In other words, they may not in any way act as though the dying person is dead until he is dead. Moreover, the text makes it explicitly clear that the dying man is to be considered "the same as a living man in every respect" (Sm. I:1). He is to have all the rights of the living, and consequently, all the powers. He may marry, divorce, inherit property and transfer it. He may do anything he wishes, for a dying man is not dead. A dying man, according to the text, is very clearly a man alive. Until he is dead, he does not forfeit any of his rights.

This emphasis on the dying man's rights must contribute to some kind of appeasement of the dying man's soul. For him to know that the tradition respects him and his rights so long as he lives must indeed be consolation. If the tradition discarded its members as they began to deteriorate, naturally the journey towards death would be more painful. The assurance of welfare and respect that the text provides to the dying surely offers some solace. A dying man in the Jewish tradition is deserving of the respect of the living.

Moreover, a dying man is aware during his life of this respect and care that he will receive. He is aware of the tradition's approach to the body and the mourners, and thus may rest assured, as he himself approaches that fateful moment, that all will be taken care of and he will be buried with the utmost dignity. He will also be soothed by the thought that his body will be washed and cleaned carefully, respectfully, and that his family and friends will be guided along as they mourn. These recognitions must appease the dying, and appeasement, in my view, is provided out of a sense of compassion. Whether or not the appeasement of the dying was the intention of the founders of this tradition we cannot

know; nevertheless, the result remains: all those affected by a man's death, even the man himself, are cared for compassionately. None are left by the wayside.

Both traditions, as they are expressed in these two works, make evident an enormous wealth of compassion. The Tibetan tradition makes this wealth explicit and uses it as its founding philosophical premise. The Jewish tradition is more subtle. However, both the Tibetan Buddhist tradition and the Jewish one clearly care for those touched by death with much compassion and tenderness. The difference in emphasis is a difference of perception, but the result is the same. Furthermore, although it may seem that the Tibetan tradition cares for both the living and the dead whereas the Jewish tradition cares only for the living, I would argue that they both essentially only care for the living. In the Tibetan view, the dead are in a sense living too, for their existence has not ceased; life in that particular body has certainly ceased, but existence goes on. There is no death then in the Tibetan world view - no death as an ultimate end. The cycle of samsara goes round and round for all those caught within it. Until one breaks through this cycle and achieves liberation, there is no beginning and there is no end. The only distinction to be made between life and death is one of state rather than one of existence. The tradition must consequently offer guidance and instruction for all states of existence, the state of after-death included. It cares for the living and for the deceased alike, for ultimately, they are not different from each other.

The Tibetan tradition, as evidenced in this text, cares primarily for the deceased rather than for the mourners, for the deceased in comparison with the mourners is facing a

much more difficult task. It offers compassionate guidance to the one who needs it most. In this case, the guidance is required most by the deceased. In the Jewish tradition, the one requiring the most guidance are the mourners left behind. The deceased in the Jewish tradition is in the hands of God. In the end then, all are taken care of in both traditions - the difference lies in the fact that in one tradition, God does part of the work; in the other, the tradition is responsible for everyone.

CONCLUSION

The worlds of Tibetan Buddhism and Judaism are far apart, and yet, despite such distance, compassion is a founding principle in both. The *Bar do thos grol* and the *Tractate Mourning* express tremendous compassion to their readers and hearers. They are different in their means of expression, but they share the same message. Both deal with death with a tender hand.

Tibetan Buddhism is a culture that presently revolves around the concept of compassion. No act, no thought, no teaching is complete without it. The bodhisattva vow is a vow of compassion that is to be held lifetime after lifetime, until all beings are free from cyclic existence. The Dalai Lama tours the world over and over again, preaching the merits of a compassionate life. And the *Bar do thos grol* leads the journeyman along his way with quiet compassion too. Indeed, the *Bar do thos grol* would not be complete, nor would it be worthy of the Tibetan culture without it.

Judaism is not so expressive about compassion. Although, as we have seen, compassion is discussed and debated in many texts throughout the ages, it does not carry with it the same expressive force. Oftentimes, the compassion of Judaism is to be found between the lines. The *Tractate Mourning* never once discusses or refers to compassion. It is not a philosophical or metaphysical text, but a legal code guiding mourners through their grief. It dictates what they are to do, when, how and with whom. Such a code can easily come across as dry and even quite controlling. Compassion does not make itself present with much of a voice, and yet we have seen that compassion quietly pours through the pages nonetheless.

The Tibetan and Jewish traditions clearly, as they are expressed in these two particular texts, manifest a great deal of care and tenderness in the face of death. They care for their living as they deal with the stages of life, never neglecting them and always protecting them. The *Bar do thos grol* is concerned with the afterlife, with the deceased as he or she moves on to the next *bardo*. Indirectly, it may also concern itself with the mourners and even perhaps with the reader. The center of attention in this case, however, is always the deceased, for their state is believed to be the most precious, and the most delicate. They need more direction than ever; the text is devoted to aiding them at this time.

The *Tractate Mourning* on the other hand, is concerned entirely with the mourners, the living left behind who now have to deal with an important loss. The deceased is of no concern, for the deceased is no longer in the hands of the living. He or she is now in the hands of the Almighty. The text therefore centers entirely around the living, and it guides them through codes and laws, instructing them precisely. There is no philosophical or metaphysical discussion in this text: this text rather expresses care and concern for its mourners by guiding them physically. Through the external, the emotional is expressed. We may therefore conclude that, just as Tibetan Buddhism expressed compassion to the deceased with metaphysical instruction, so does Judaism, in the *Tractate Mourning*, express compassion and tenderness through its laws.

APPENDIX

One of the most interesting differences between Tibetan Buddhism and Judaism in regards to death is their burial rites. The *Tractate Mourning*, as we have seen, is quite concerned with burial arrangements. The final three chapters of the text are devoted entirely to burial and cemetery etiquette. The text also discusses at length who is to be buried and who is not, how they are to be buried, by whom etc. With exact precision, the Jewish community is guided in the disposal of the body of their deceased. We may link this concern to a passage in Genesis. *And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them* (Gen. 1:27). Man is made in the image of God. His life is God's breath. And thus, his body and life are to be preserved and cared for as the sacred entities that they are. One may not discard the human body or maim it in any way, for the human body is God's creation and must be respected as such.

An excellent example of this respect for the body is the *Hevra Kadisha*, the Holy Society. This was a group, once found in every Jewish community, "of those who volunteered to take care of the preparation of the dead for burial. Those engaged in this sacred task were always volunteers because it was considered a great honor to carry out the last good deed that we can do for those who have died" (Riemer, 81). The procedure is carried out with prayer and respect. Daniel Troy explains the prohibition against passing objects over the corpse for example, as an affirmation of "the humanity of the person whose body is lying before us; it seeks to ensure that the members of the *Hevra* continue to accord a dead person the respect normally given to those still alive" (Riemer, 86-87).

The conservation of the entire body during the *Hevra Kadisha* procedure is completely assured. During his first performance of this *mitzvah*, Troy was given the task

> of cutting off every part of the covering sheet that contained any blood, so that it could be put in the coffin and buried with the [corpse], as required by law... Every part of a person - even a few spots of his blood on a sheet - is to be treated with equal respect and interred with him (Riemer, 89).

Compare this attitude with the famous Tibetan Sky Burial and we have before us a fascinating difference between the two cultures. The Sky Burial is one of the most common means of body disposal in Tibet, as well as one of the most dramatic known to man. The body of the deceased is cut up and offered to vultures as a final act of charity. Powers describes the ceremony:

> The burial process begins when a Tantric master marks a mandala on the chest and stomach of the corpse, after which *rogyapas* ("body cutters") slice across the chest with large knives in accordance with the master's instructions. They then remove the internal organs and slice flesh from bone. Next the bones are beaten with stone hammers and mixed with barley flour (*tsampa*) in order make them more palatable to the vultures, which by this time have generally gathered in anticipation.
>
> The feeding of the birds usually takes place in an area of flat rock called a mandala. The *rogyapas* wait until a sufficient amount of flesh and bones have been prepared to feed all the vultures that appear (in order that they not begin fighting among themselves and thus cause each other injury). The corpse is tied down in order to prevent the vultures from carrying it off before this. Then the *rogyapas* begin tossing pieces of the corpse into the mandala, where the vultures eagerly consume them. One *rogyapa* generally has the task of keeping the hungry vultures at bay with a long rope, which he swings around in order to prevent them from entering the mandala until the proper time.
>
> When the flesh and bone have been disposed of, the Tantric master takes the skull of the deceased and inserts a long needle into the "Brahma opening" at the top, allowing the consciousness to escape (if it has not already done so). Then the skull is smashed and the brains and skull are fed to the vultures (Powers, 308).

The body is reportedly devoured in no longer than half an hour.

In Jewish terms, the Tibetan manner of disposing the body would be considered profoundly disrespectful of that which was created in the image of God. In Tibetan terms

however, it is the most honest and piercing expression of the dharma: it is the expression of impermanence and non-attachment.

Not only is the burial itself an expression of impermanence and non-attachment, but the absence of reference to it in the *Bar do thos 'grol* is as well. Not once in the entire text does the reader come across any indication or direction with regards to the disposal of the body. The disposal of the body is simply never mentioned. The only concern of the text is the state of the soul of the deceased. The body, now that it has been emptied of life, becomes irrelevant.

The Jewish tradition, along with one of its principle texts on the subject, the *Tractate Mourning*, is replete with directions in regards to the disposal of the body. The body is cared for, cleaned and neatly placed into the earth, with nothing missing. There is a strong commitment to the preservation of that which was created in God's likeness. The Tibetan tradition on the other hand, in one of its principal texts, does not once ever refer to the manner in which the body is to be disposed of. The focus is placed on the soul rather than on the body left behind. In effect, the body is of no value and so will be disposed of, but the disposal is not the greatest concern. Moreover, the most common Tibetan disposal itself is in direct contrast to the careful attention paid to the body in Judaism. It is fed to the birds and leaves nothing behind - surely an abomination in the Jewish world view. And yet, this act of desecration of a body is, in the Tibetan view, a sacred act, a commitment to a teaching that there is no permanence and nothing to become attached to. Both the Jewish tradition and the Tibetan tradition are, in this final

act, expressing their beliefs with care and much compassion. Once again then, we see how two such different voices may be expressing the same words.

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